

**We Have No Choice!**  
**Social Exclusion and Citizenship**  
**of the Nepalese Community in Hong Kong**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the dimensions of social exclusion and struggles of citizenship fulfillment of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, paying particular attention to the Nepalese community. The basis for this thesis is data collected in thirty-six in-depth interviews and participant observation from December 2000 to October 2001. The basic argument underlying the analysis is that social exclusion is undeniably existing in Hong Kong, especially among the ethnic minorities. With full citizenship is often taken for granted as a solution of social exclusion, it is difficult to achieve.

The main body of the studies is organized in five parts. The first part provides an overview of the concept of social exclusion and citizenship, noting that little work has been conducted on the dynamic among social exclusions and the argument of citizenship fulfillment, as formulation by Marshall and Soysal. The second part gives an account on the background and distribution of the Nepalese in Hong Kong. The third part presents social exclusion along different social aspects, including the cultural, economic, civil and political exclusion against the Nepalese community. In addition, they are also being excluded from their homeland. They are indeed marginal people. The fourth part illustrates the reinforcement of exclusion by analyzing the dynamics among various modes of exclusion. They interweave with each other and form a vicious cycle of exclusion against the Nepalese. The final part focuses on the internal frustration of combating social exclusion while in the conquest of citizenship fulfillment. The analysis supports Marshall's argument of citizenship instead of Soysal's. It is conclude that even if the Nepalese are granted for citizenship because of the Right of Abode, they still suffer from serious social exclusion and have no choice. The study of Hong Kong Nepalese and their social condition give us a better understanding of the Hong Kong Nepalese as a minority group, as well as the wider issues of social exclusion and citizenship.



## 論文摘要

本項研究旨在以尼泊爾社群為案例，探究及分析香港少數族裔在面對社會隔離(social exclusion)的情況及其在爭取完整公民身份時的掙扎，以補充香港有關這些方面的研究和理論探討。

是次研究的資料來自二零零零年十二月至二零零一年十月期間進行的三十六個深入訪問和參與觀察。研究的基本論點是香港一直存有社會隔離的情況，有學者提出，完整的公民身份乃解決此情況的途徑之一；然而，少數社群要爭取完整的公民身份，卻異常困難。

論文主要分為五大部份。第一部份會概括地介紹有關社會隔離和公民身份的理論討論，指出現存研究的不足以及 Marshall 和 Soysal 兩位學者在討論完整公民身份的理論分歧。第二部份簡介尼泊爾社群在香港的歷史背景和現況。第三部份探討尼泊爾社群在香港所面對來自文化、經濟、公民、政治大四方面的社會隔離。同時，他們在祖國也同樣面對不同程度的社會隔離。他們正正是 Robert Park 所形容的「邊緣人」(Marginal man)。第四部份會集中討論來自不同範疇的社會隔離如何互相強化彼此力量，形成惡性循環，使尼泊爾社群無法逃脫被隔離的惡運。第五部份論述尼泊爾社群以爭取完整公民身份作為打破社會隔離的方法，但社群的內部分歧卻造成了其爭取過程中的最大障礙。此部份也論證了在討論社會隔離的問題上，相較於 Soysal 的理論，Marshall 的公民身份討論更為恰當。最後，總結指出尼泊爾社群在擁用居港權的前題下，理應同時擁有完整的公民身份，但實際上卻是兩回事。面對社會隔離，他們從來也沒有選擇。

是次研究一方面補充了香港有關少數族裔的研究，另一方面對社會隔離和公民身份都有進一步的探討，對將來同類的研究具重要的意義。



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## **List of Abbreviations**

BNO	British National (Overseas) Passport
CEM	Thematic Household Survey Report No.4: The Characteristics of the Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong
CITA	Construction Industry Training Authority
FEONA	Far East Overseas Nepalese Association
GNF	Gurkhas (Nepalese) Federation, Hong Kong
HAB	Home Affairs Bureau
HKAR	Hong Kong Annual Report
NBA	Nepalese Business Association
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
ROA	Right of Abode
SCMP	South China Morning Post
VTC	Vocational Training Council
YMMSS	Yau Memorial Methodist Social Service

## **Preface**

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Chan Hoi Man, my supervisor, for his enormous help and invaluable guidance throughout the preparation of this thesis. I would also like to thank Prof. Lui Tai-lok and Prof. Ting Kwok Fai for their valuable comment on my thesis.

Throughout the process, the most fruitful reward is the friendship with the Nepalese. I am very grateful to their help. They helped me in various ways, such as introduced some important interviewee to me, brought me in and showed me around their community, invited me to their gatherings and concerts and so on. Without their generosity in sharing their experience, it is impossible for me to collect the rich data and hence finish this thesis. Their real life stories broaden my horizons. I owe many thanks to my informants, especially Ramesh Gurung and coordinators of FEONA who helped me and had lessened the barriers for me to get access to the community.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my dear classmates and friends. Their support and friendship have made these two years a wonderful and unforgettable time in my life.



## Chapter 1 Introduction

Hong Kong has been promoted as an international city full of opportunities. Its door is widely open for migrants all over the world. In fact, there is a saying that Hong Kong is built up by immigrants. However, ethnic minority composes only about 5% of Hong Kong's population, the population in fact is increasing significantly. According to population census 2001, the population of non-Chinese is 343 950. Compared with the census in 1991, when the population of non-Chinese was merely 282 700, the increase rate is more than 26 per cent. That is considerably high rate indeed. There is clearly a need of studies on ethnic minorities.

Many media reports have spotlighted hardship facing by ethnic minorities, particularly in terms of occupations and education. Ethnic minorities seem to have great difficulty to integrate into Hong Kong society in these two aspects. Reports about the social problems caused by them are also often heard. Social workers warned that there is an urgent need for ethnicity assimilation, otherwise, they might interfere social stability and solidarity in the long term, as their discontent about their life in Hong Kong increases gradually.

As a matter of fact, the term "social exclusion" has been widely discussed in the European Countries where the term was originally coined in the 1980s. However, as Samers (1998) noted, there is the lack of immigrants or ethnic studies in a social exclusion perspective<sup>1</sup>. He suggests that using the term as discussion framework provides us with a wide picture of ethnic minorities' social situation. As a result, I intend to look at the social condition of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong through the examination of social exclusion against the Nepalese in this thesis. Based upon extensive data collected from the respondents, I confirm the existence of exclusion in different social aspects in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, I also look at the

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<sup>1</sup> Samers, M. 1998. Immigration, 'Ethnic minorities', and 'Social Exclusion' in the European Union: a Critical Perspective. *Geoforum*, Vol. 29, No.2, p.126.



process of citizenship fulfillment as a strategy to fight against exclusion.

## 1.2 Reasons of Choosing the Nepalese Case

According to *Hong Kong Annual Report 2000*, the Nepalese is the 9<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group in Hong Kong after Filipinos, Indonesians, Americans, Canadians, Thais, Indians, Australians and British accordingly.

Except for the Indians, there is little study about the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. The general impression seems to me that the majority of those groups' population is mainly composed by working visa holders<sup>2</sup>. While Filipinos, Indonesians and Thais are mainly groups of domestic helpers, others are mainly businessmen or professionals. They are here for contract work. And thus, their legal status in Hong Kong is fundamentally temporary. Besides, they are not qualified to entitle citizenship in Hong Kong. Whereas the large population of the Nepalese community resides in Hong Kong as a permanent residency status, who is permitted to get the Right of Land under the British Nationality Acts of 1948<sup>3</sup> and later Right to Abode under the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984. Therefore, the majority of the Nepalese is granted with legal permanent residency in Hong Kong. They are indeed Hong Kong citizens and being part of Hong Kong society. By law, they are entitled to citizenship, which contains rights and obligations as well as the welfare benefits. They are assumed to be able to enjoy privileges of being citizens and enhance the primary social integration. However, increasing indicators abound for what be read as social disintegration in the Nepalese community: high

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<sup>2</sup> There are five different kinds of visas given to foreigners to stay in Hong Kong legally. 1) Permanent Hong Kong Residence: due to being born in Hong Kong or the Right to Abode given to migrant worker and skilled labour workers excluding soldiers and domestic helpers after seven years of constant employment. 2) Dependent visas: this is given to groups containing close relatives of the first group. For example, spouse, parents or children of the first group (permanent ID holder) can apply the Dependent Visas and stay in Hong Kong. After they stay here more than five years continuously, they can also apply for the permanent ID. 3) Contract visa: this depends upon the quota for foreign labour import and valid for two years only. In other words, the holders of contract visa have to re-new their contract in order to re-new their visa. However, the import of domestic helpers does not depend on a quota. 4) Student visas and 5) tourist visas.

<sup>3</sup> This is confirmed by FEONA's sources and my fieldwork. Almost two-third of interviewees are Hong Kong permanent residents. Even some interviewees are dependent visa holders, but that

incidence of crime, joblessness, mistrust of neighbours and of government, and so on. These have been widely reported in the media<sup>4</sup>. Obviously, the Nepalese are not well integrated into the Hong Kong society. So, what are the obstacles of their integration? Or more precisely, what are the social conditions restricting them to obtain the full citizenship? Their unique identity and unusual experience provide a good vantage point to explore social condition in Hong Kong and address the sociological questions about migrants' studies.

In addition, government documents<sup>5</sup> have defined the Nepalese community as a newly settled ethnic minority community. The Nepalese community indeed has under the spotlight of public attention<sup>6</sup>. Being a newly settled group, they are firstly assumed to be more sensitive to the social condition, which they encounter to be included or excluded, in contrast with others groups which have been settled in Hong Kong for a long time, such as Indians<sup>7</sup>. They are assumed to be more aggressive in standing for their rights. To analyze them in the territory provides us the best chance to map out the recent social condition of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. After all, their settlement in Hong Kong is just about a decade. They are indeed the first generation of Nepalese immigrants in Hong Kong<sup>8</sup>.

Lastly, they are a little studied group that inspires my academic interests to

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implies their close relationship with permanent ID holder, such as parents, children and spouse.

<sup>4</sup> There are so many reports about discrimination against the Nepalese from different sectors of society, for example SCMP, 6 June 2000; Eastweek Vol. 423 and 437; Mingpao, 10 August 2000; 30 October 2000; 04 January 2001; Mingpao NT West Edition, 15 December 2000; Ubeat Vol. 40; Singpao, 09 October 2000; 03 January 2001; Appledaily, 01 April 2001, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> HAB has published several reports and used "a new community" to describe the Nepalese community. The term was first appeared in a outline report on racial discrimination in Hong Kong. They used the term again in a report of recent survey. The survey is conducted for the bureau by a private company, ACNielsen, in December, 1999 to January, 2000. It is the first attempt to determine the demographic profile of non-Chinese and identify their needs and difficulties. The survey findings can be found in the report entitled "Thematic Household Survey Report No.4".

<sup>6</sup> Media have extensively reported about the Nepalese in Hong Kong especially after the controversial court discussion about the right of non-indigenous villagers standing as candidates of the village chief election in Kam Tin. Further references can be found in Apple Daily 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2001; Hong Kong Commercial Daily 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2001; Oriental Daily, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2001; SCMP 26<sup>th</sup> February.

<sup>7</sup> The survey of ethnic minorities by HAB has repeated this point for several times in the report. In fact, the history of Indian settlement in Hong Kong can be traced back to 1841 according to Law's studies. It was more than a century earlier than the Nepalese arrival.

<sup>8</sup> The origin of the Nepalese migrants to Hong Kong can be traced back to 1948 when the first troop of Gurkhas was sent to Hong Kong. For more details, please refer to Chapter Three.



disclose the hidden stories behind them. As Foucault believes, if we continue to ignore those excluded people's voice, people would just gradually forget them. And it would be just like they had never existed. In this context, excluded people are not only being excluded from their living society, but also being erased from history. To Foucault, this is the extreme form of exclusion. Hence, there is a need to record and study the voice of excluded groups. I focus upon the concept "social exclusion" for analysis after I have conducted the preliminary research. Results of my fieldwork provide me with substantial data to apply and argue the concept in details.

### **1.3 Local Ethnic Studies in Hong Kong**

Despite the rising population of ethnic groups, there are few empirical researches about them in Hong Kong. Most studies are largely concerning about the policymaking rather than in-depth studies. Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) has conducted a statistical research on ethnic minorities from 1999 to 2000. It provides some basic demography data of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. The Yau Memorial Methodist Social Service (YMMSS) Yau Tsim District outreaching team has written a report on the educational needs and social adaptation of ethnic minorities youth in Hong Kong. Both reports provide general idea of Hong Kong's ethnic minorities situation. The former gives only statistical data including education attainment, occupations and difficulties encountered etc. And the latter tries to balance between quantitative and qualitative data (such as in-depth interviews with ethnic youths) as well. What's more, ethnic groups do provide academic interests for researchers. For example, Law Noel Sin Yee studied Indians Association and its members in her master thesis. In fact, Indian community has attracted most attention from scholars as compared to other migration groups.

Specifically for the Nepalese in Hong Kong, there is little systematic study on them so far. In fact, the existing documents about the Gurkhas focus on the general

information about the Gurkhas at large. Hong Kong's Gurkhas are not being mentioned particularly (Farwell 1995; Economist 1999). Relating to my paper, Lotter S. (1997) has done a remarkable work on the Nepalese community in Hong Kong after 1997<sup>9</sup>. Her thesis stresses on the different ways used by the Nepalese to extend their agencies in order to stay in Hong Kong. She gives accounts on the figures and reasons of the Nepalese immigration to Hong Kong before or in 1997. Using the Weiner's differentiated model as her framework to analyze push and pull factors of the Nepalese migration, she concludes that Hong Kong is undoubtedly attractive for the Nepalese mainly because it provides access variables, i.e. high income, despite the problem of affinity variables such as language and integration problem. Besides the description of constraints given by the immigration law, she also explores its grey areas, which grant space of extended stay. For instance, the street traders use the tourist visas to enter Hong Kong for a month and do business for the last 14 years continuously. In the second part of her thesis, her focus has shifted to compare the Nepalese literature with narration of current experience. This part shows the differences between literature and local situation of present migrants. For example, female migrants have been described as weeping wives in the literature but participate in the job market in reality. In sum, using Weiner's differentiated model, Lotter's studies has pinpointed the crucial reasons of the Nepalese migration in Hong Kong. However, her study is rather brief and general. She neither explained the dynamic between variables nor the reasons of their prioritization.

Meanwhile, being the first Nepalese association in Hong Kong, Far East Overseas Nepalese Association<sup>10</sup> (FEONA) has produced two reports on the Nepalese community in Hong Kong (FEONA 1999 and 2000). One is focused on

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<sup>9</sup> Lotter, S. 1997. *The Nepalese Community in Hong Kong after July 1997*. MA. Social Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London, p.10

<sup>10</sup> FEONA is the oldest Nepalese organization in Hong Kong. As far as I know, it is the only Nepalese organization having full time coordinator and permanent formal office as well. I will tell more about FEONA in Chapter Six.



women's right while the other concerns about the general situation of discrimination among ethnic minority in Hong Kong. The former, *Final Report of Empowering Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, emphasizes the importance of empowering women with the purpose of against gender discrimination. The latter, *Equality for All Races and Sexes*, is conference report reviewing discrimination against ethnic minority in Hong Kong. Both reports have also pinpointed the economic exclusion and civic exclusion against the Nepalese. Nevertheless, they are lack of substantial data to support their arguments. In short, existing researches can hardly provide a systematic analysis or framework of the social situation of the Nepalese migrants in Hong Kong.

#### **1.4 Layout of the Thesis**

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the experience of social exclusion and citizenship formation with regard to the Nepalese migrants in Hong Kong. The next chapter is a brief discussion of theories and remarks on methods. By tracing the origin and theoretical definition of the concept "social exclusion", I argue that the concept is a multidimensional, useful term in exploring the social situation of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. However, the term is embedded in European culture. It has openly defined in order to be more flexible in applications. It does not saying very much about the definition and dynamical relations between exclusions namely cultural, civil, economic and political exclusion respectively. Therefore, I suggest further exploration on the dynamic relations among the dimensions of social exclusion will be more significant in the sense of understanding situation of excluded groups and possible solution for them. I also question that the term perceives the phenomenon from a rather macro and policy making view which has underestimated the autonomy of the excluded individuals. In fact, individual involvement shapes the situation whether they choose to confront or accept the situation. Meanwhile, in the discourse of social exclusion, complete



citizenship is treated as a way to overcome the problem. Through the comparison with Soysal's model of citizenship, Marshall's approach is more appropriate in the discussion. Lastly, I present remarks on the methods I have employed in the thesis. They are namely participant observations and in-depth interviews. For both methods, I have encountered language as barrier in application. I finally depended upon the interviews. Nevertheless, I also give some suggestions for the limitation.

Chapter Three lays out the historical background of the Nepalese migration and their deployment as well as settlement in the territory. This Chapter outlines the scenario and provides background of this paper. I divide the Nepalese community into five groups of people. As far as this dissertation concern, I focus especially on two groups who have or most likely have ROA in Hong Kong.

Chapter Four uses the social exclusion framework to identify four major facets of social exclusion in Hong Kong. They are namely cultural, economic, civil and political exclusion. I give detailed discussion on each aspect separately. Each of them is based on specific theme(s). Extensive quotations are directly cited from interviews. On the one hand, they are rich enough to back up my arguments of existing exclusion. On the other hand, they also should be read as evidences of the language standard of the Nepalese, which is considered to be their major cultural exclusion in Hong Kong as well.

Chapter Five addresses the malign dynamics between exclusions. I state that each type of exclusions reinforces and dominates each other. And hence, exclusions have interacted together into a vicious cycle. Once people enter such cycle, it is difficult to exit. And that causes the Nepalese having the sense of being without choice. Some of them even internalize the rationale of being excluded. That is the extreme form of exclusion when the excluded people accept their disadvantaged situation and give up attempt to escape.

Chapter Six discusses citizenship fulfillment as a solution of exclusion. I compare the conventional Marshall's model and Soysal's revised model. I argue

that Marshall's model still has its significance in talking about the Nepalese citizenship fulfillment in order to combat social exclusion. I lay out the history of the Nepalese citizenship fulfillment in Hong Kong. Through looking closely at both the organizational and individual level, I conclude that the failure of utilizing political rights, which is supposed to be used to counteract social exclusion against the Nepalese community, finally turns out to be another form of exclusion.

The conclusion summarizes that the concept "social exclusion" provides a framework to analyze ethnic minority's social situation in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, it is also important to seek for the dynamics among dimensions of social exclusion. In the Nepalese cases, there are four types of exclusion against them. Different exclusions are overlapping and reinforcing each other. Therefore, the vicious cycle emerges in the community and thus the Nepalese are further excluded. When they cannot tolerate anymore, they approach to the political rights and hope to combat the exclusion by complete citizenship. However, their failure in utilizing political rights also becomes the cause of other exclusions, as well as providing the consequences of internal diversity. In short, the Nepalese community still has a long way to go before they can be finally freed from social exclusion and obtain the full citizenship.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

*Observers in fact only agree on a single point: the impossibility to define the status of "the excluded" by a single and unique criterion. Reading numerous enquiries and reports on exclusion reveals a profound confusion amongst experts. (Weinberg & Ruano-Borbalan 1993)<sup>11</sup>*

From the realm of social policies' debates to the discourses of group identification, the term "social exclusion" is widely used<sup>12</sup>. However, many researchers complain that it is a "chaotic concept" since it often confuses with other common and well developed terms, such as "underclass" and "poverty", which perhaps also describe same group of people, i.e. isolated group. (Ratcliffe 1999; Samers 1998). In fact, the usage of the expression has a close relationship with the concept of poverty in Europe. According to Room (1995a), the discussion over poverty was first appeared in European the anti-poverty programme in 1975-80. The notion of "poverty" was the focus of the first and second programmes. But when the third programme launched in 1990-94, 'social exclusion' became the fashionable terminology. To against social exclusion was the crucial part of programmes. The term has been given central place in the discussions of social inequalities and social policies in Europe since then. There are two implications from this instance. Firstly, obviously the notion "social exclusion" is introduced more recent, later than concept of poverty. More important, it is being perceived as a more advanced and useful concept in social policies discourse after it shows its power by dominating the discourse in the recent social programme in European countries, particularly in France.

So what is "social exclusion"? What are its features? These are the questions that I intend to answer in this chapter. I first review the origin of the discourse and pinpoint its uniqueness in application for explaining the social phenomenon. I highlight the differences between social exclusion and other

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<sup>11</sup> The original text is in French. The English version is quoted from Silver, H. 1995. *Reconceptualizing Social Disadvantage: Three Paradigms of Social Exclusion*.

<sup>12</sup> Ratcliffe has done a good job in summarizing the principal usages of social exclusion. For further discussion, please refer to his article, "Housing Inequality and 'Race': Some Critical Reflections on



similar concepts, such as poverty and underclass. Social exclusion provides a multidimensional perspective for analyzing the isolated mass of impoverished, and enhances better understanding of their life by an all-rounded approach. By the time I point out the differences between social exclusion and other terms, the purpose of its clarification is achieved. Thirdly, in order to gain a clear picture of its formation, it is necessary to go through the different approaches of social exclusion. Each of them provides an explanation of social exclusion from a specific arena. Silver's (1995) models are used to sum up the differences between various approaches. They are namely monopoly approach, solidarity approach and specialization approach. Fourthly, I extend the discussion of monopoly approach, seeing citizenship fulfillment as a method to combat social exclusion. Here, I pull in the discussions of citizenship from Marshall and Soysal respectively. Finally, I evaluate the weakness of being overlooked the autonomy of excluded individuals in previous studies. The core discussions of social exclusion neither emphasize the importance of dynamics between exclusions nor mention the role and responses of excluded parties towards exclusion. The concept overstates the role of social agent and underestimates the power of excluded individuals. The power of excluded individual can be seen in actions to against exclusion such as organizing activities to approach citizenship fulfillment. I further illustrate this point in the succeeding chapters.

## **2.1 The Origin of Social Exclusion**

The notion of social exclusion is originated from French tradition (Atkinson 2000; Andersen 1999; Alden and Thomas 1998; Gore 1995; Sen 2000). It began to appear in French discourse on poverty and inequality issues during the 1960s, referring to the poor as the "excluded". Rene Lenoir, the Secretaire d'Etat a l'Action Sociale of the French Government, was the one who authorized the

expression in 1974. The term was used to describe social categories unprotected under social insurance principle at that time (Silver 1995; Sen 2000; Room 1995). It became more widespread in the 1980s. “Exclusion” came to refer to more and more types of social disadvantages, from poverty to wider range of social “misfits” such as mentally and physically handicapped, aged invalids, marginal, asocial persons, and so on. Despite the usage of the term has shifted, it carries one important connotation. It arises with a conceptualization of national sovereignty founded in the idea of “the one and indivisible republic”, so that actions combating social exclusion seek the social, political and moral insertion of subjects within this wider unified French social order (Silver 1995). Later the term was introduced in the European Community by Jacques Delors during the mid-1980s. Since then, it spreads throughout Europe and becomes a key concept seeking to understand and to alleviate negative social effects of social development.

The Single European Act in 1987 and the Masstricht Treaty in 1991 accelerated the pace of movement towards ever-closer union. Prior to the mid-1980s, European actions of equity issues were aimed either at specific countries or at particular declining sectors of industry, such as the iron and steel industry. By the mid-1980s, complex negotiations over widening and deepening the Community led to a sharpened focus on marginal social groups within each of the member states. Apart from modernization and the growth of competitiveness of the European economy, there were growing and incontrovertible evidences that some groups were unlikely to be benefited from these changes. This evidence also gained political salience in the negotiations prior to the Masstricht Treaty, which was intended to be a fundamental next step towards ever-closer union.

It was in this institutional context that Jacques Delors introduced the concept of social exclusion in a set of negotiation with the social partners (Madanipour, Cars and Allen 1998:13).

The term used in European Community negotiations in a very different way. Different from the French tradition, the aim of combating social exclusion was to

promote social and economic cohesion instead of achieving insertion. There was an important shift in perspective at the European level. It shifted from a view which sees the problem of cohesion as one of relationships among the member states to one which sees the population of the Union as a whole and among whom social exclusion must be addressed wherever it occurs (Silver 1995). Meanwhile, the union's usage of the concept of social exclusion implies a clear acknowledgement that there are negative effects, disadvantaging particular groups, built into the dynamics of achieving ever-closer union (Madanipour, Cars and Allen 1998). Thus, action programme to combat social exclusion and to promote social solidarity was launched in the name of the Union's political responsibility for addressing these problems. However, implementation of the action programme was devolved upon the member states. This devolution has led to terminological diversity among countries since the concept was different in various national contexts.

The brief introduction of the term's origin provides the background of the following approaches which have conceptualized social exclusion based upon various concerns. It also explains why the concept "social exclusion" being so ambiguous and multidimensional. The concept does not have one simple definition. This reflects from the wide range of empirical referents. It always conflates with poverty, inequality, discrimination and the underclass. It also associates with a variety of terms like closure, disaffiliation, deprivation and marginality. Even so, Silver (1995) disagrees that the difficulty of defining the concept in single meaning should be seen as an obstacle of its application. In fact, that should be seen as its advantage and uniqueness because that provides flexibility to its application. Therefore, it can be interpreted differently in various contexts at different times and thus enhances better understanding of isolated group. Meanwhile, she points out that:

The discourse of exclusion may serve as a window through meaning which one may view political cultures. From this perspective, the multiple meanings of the term are not problematical, but rather



inherent to a concept with is “contested”, in the sense that its proper use “inevitably involves endless disputes” (Silver 1995:61).

## **2.2 Special features of Social Exclusion Approach**

In fact, in general term, social exclusion as many other terms, such as poverty and underclass, is terminology having been used to define groups of impoverished people, whose chances of upward social and economic mobility are minimal. Walker (1995) even comments that they are just “a different thing to different people”. Nevertheless, despite the ambiguous of its definition, more scholars do find some special features of the concept of social exclusion lying on its discussion of origin and conceptualization.

### **2.2.1 Origin Does Make Differences**

Davoudi and Atkinson (1999) write one of the special features of social exclusion lies on its concept of society. The notion of social exclusion is originated from the French tradition, while poverty/underclass carries the themes of Anglo-Saxon tradition (Atkinson 2000; Andersen 1999; Alden and Thomas 1998; Davoudi and Atkinson 1999). For social exclusion, the concept of society is composed of intellectual and political elites as a fairly rigid hierarchy or as a number of collectivities, bound together by a sets of reciprocal rights and obligations that are rooted in some broader moral order. Social exclusion is the process of becoming detached from this moral order. It is held that the state seeks to ensure all citizens being assimilated into this moral order of society. Hence, the issue of solidarity is central to debates surrounding exclusion and that is forwarded by the discussion of citizenship (Davoudi and Atkinson 1999; Madnipor, Cars and Allen 1998). On the other hand, the concept of poverty is based upon the idea that society is split and composed of individuals who are in constant competition with one another. It focuses on income inequality and material exclusion. It is held that the state ought only to ensure a minimum material standard of well being for each individual.

Within this context, poverty/underclass is viewed as a static concept instead of a dynamic process. On the contrary, Davoudi and Atkinson point out that social exclusion is, to certain extent, opposite to poverty/underclass approaches. It is primarily concerned with relational issues and the dynamic process that leads to the breaking of social ties and the marginalisation of groups in relation to the nation. That is because:

the French tradition places emphasis on the need to create social solidarity and to ensure that all individuals are integrated into and participate in a national social and moral order (Davoudi and Atkinson 1999:2).

### 2.2.2 An Umbrella Approach

Social exclusion is a multidimensional concept. Its discussion covers an explanation of multiple forms of social disadvantage – economic, civil, political, and cultural – and accordingly encompasses theories of citizenship and racial-ethnic inequality as well as poverty and long-term unemployment.

Gore (1995) highlights the value of social exclusion approach by emphasising the political aspects, such as political rights and citizenship, which outlines a relationship between individuals and the state as well as between the society and the individual. Room (1995) concurs with Gore's view by specifically pointing out that the notion of social exclusion focuses primarily on relational issues. And the relational issues are in the senses of inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and power.

Berghman (1995) also agrees that social exclusion is a comprehensive concept. It bears a less than one-dimensional connotation with the income dimension of poverty. For him, social exclusion refers to a breakdown or malfunctioning of the major societal systems that should guarantee full citizenship. Poverty is part of – specific form of – social exclusion. The latter is broader and should not necessarily always encompass an element of poverty. He goes on that there is the concept of relative deprivation in between poverty and social exclusion. In theory, relative



deprivation is in line with the social exclusion concept. In practice, however, its operationalisation has generally rendered it a broader version of the poverty concept.

Geddes and Benington (2001) give one set of concrete interpretations of social exclusion starting from the notion of multidimensionality. It refers to the combined impact of factors such as lack of adequate education, non-participation in the mainstream of society and lack of job opportunities, and so on. Each type of deprivation has an impact on the others. As a result, social exclusion is a vicious circle among the factors. Although the concept of social exclusion does consistent with underclass and poverty analysis, the importance of this concept is that it moves the debate forward beyond (but not away from) the material dimensions of deprivation. Moreover, it is also in line with dimensions of exclusion suggested by: from consumption of goods and services; from (or within) labour market; from land and other resources, including credit; from security; from human rights; and from participation in political and policy processes. Geddes and Benington also stress the need of recognizing not only the material deprivation of the poor, but also their inability to fully exercise their civil, economic and political rights as citizens.

In his conclusion, Gore (1995) holds that social exclusion is actually a way of integration loosely connected notions such as poverty, deprivation, lack of access to goods, services and assets, precariousness of social rights, and of providing a general framework. In fact, he criticizes that the discourse of poverty/underclass (the major victims of exclusion) has over emphasized the economic aspects and has not paid enough attention to political and cultural dimensions. To use the social exclusion as a multidimensional approach,

first, through directing more attention to the relationships between poverty and agency; and second, by providing a framework to draw together separate literatures on access to land, employment, organization and representation and social services, and to inter-relate them in way which illuminates trajectories of social change (Gore 1995:6).

Hence, it is an umbrella approach in the sense of coverage and linkage with the

discussion of notions describing social disadvantage. It is also an advanced concept as it forwards the discussion by adding multiple dimensions in analysis.

2.2.3 Focus on Process

Rodgers (1995) finds one of the advantages of using social exclusion, in contrast with most work on poverty, is paying attention to process. The concept not only captures the situations of poverty and deprivation, but also studies the mechanisms, which lead to the situation. Accordingly, there are two types of exclusion. One is permanent exclusion. That is faced by the group living on the margins of society. Another type of exclusion is “created and recreated by the operation of social and economic forces, and thus individuals move from vulnerability to dependence to marginality, or groups are constantly restructured, subject to deliberate actions to maintain their dependence (Rodgers 1995:50)”. In that sense, social exclusion is a dynamic social process.

Particular patterns of development have exclusion built into them. It specially happens when “economic growth is concentrated on particular regions or groups, the gains are captured by national or international elites, the need for cheap and docile labour leads to the suppression of rights, the restructuring of older systems of production and exchange leads to the suppression of institutions for sharing and participation (Rodgers 1995:51)”. So it is fundamental to understand the persistence of poverty, mechanisms and process of exclusion.

Berghman agrees that social exclusion carries dynamic character. The following table illustrates his ideas of the differences between poverty, impoverishment, deprivation and social exclusion.

Table 2.1: Differences of Similar Concepts

	Static outcome	Dynamic process
Income	Poverty	Impoverishment
Multidimensional	Deprivation	Social exclusion

Berghman suggests that the difference between concepts of poverty and social



exclusion is their connotation nature. Poverty is a static outcome of a lack of disposable income and social exclusion is an outcome of a more complex process than the case in situations of pure income poverty. He suggests that poverty and deprivation are more appropriate to denote the outcome or the situation. And social exclusion should refer to the process.

It is clear that in its static-outcome meaning, social exclusion (i.e., deprivation) is characterized by its comprehensiveness, embracing the multidimensional aspects of living conditions, and that its dynamic character is emphasized on its process meaning. It focuses on the multiple nature of disadvantage and looks beyond issues of income inequality to incorporate the social, cultural and political aspects of disadvantage as well as the notion of citizenship rights.

#### 2.2.4 Focus on Social Agents and Actors

The concept of social exclusion focuses on the social agents and actors who both include and exclude. In the case of combating exclusion, it is important to identify actors and agents, and understand how and why they exclude others. Rodgers mentions that there are several social actors actively defending their domains against outsiders.

Firstly, apparently the state is an important actor. On the one hand, it may play the role of umpire controlling the exclusion of one group by another or ensuring that different groups stay in their place and work together. On the other hand, its action may also lead to the exclusion from services and opportunities of those whom is independent. Or its action may result at the compulsory inclusion of groups against their will. For example, indigenous groups forced into the market and unable to maintain traditional land rights, or peasants forced into plantation wage labour by taxation or coercion. Chan and Yu (2001) point out that the general governmental view of fighting against social exclusion in fact can be ended up as exercises in social control. As the 'superiority' of the mainstream culture may be

reinforced in that case, which is another type of exploitation of minorities. After all, the state is an active actor to determinate and to identify the groups of being included or excluded. These are typical instances that government plays significant role in exclusion.

Secondly, powerful groups in different social sector such as enterprises, military, local authorities, religious bodies and local elites, and so on, are also social actors of exclusion. For instance, enterprises create employments and so provide inclusive opportunities to individuals in economic sense. However, if their strive for competitiveness ignores account of social responsibility, they also actively exclude workers' social protection. Meanwhile, Rodgers also points out that academics and international agencies take part in exclusion process. That reflects both from their work focuses attention and sets priorities. In spite of all, power is the core mechanism of both exclusion and inclusion.

After outlining the origin and features of social exclusion, perhaps the idea of social exclusion is getting clearer. Now we turn to look deeper at the discourses in European tradition.

As mentioned above, the concept does not have a single definition and its application is diversified. From the multiple responses of exclusion debates and studies, there are similarities among arguments which basically from the same approach or discourse about social exclusion. Levitas (1998) holds that there are mainly three discourses of social exclusion. The first is situated in critical social policy and is redistributionist discourse, RED, in which social exclusion is intertwined with poverty. The second deploys cultural rather than material explanations of poverty. This moral underclass discourse, MUD, originally used the term underclass, but now also uses the language of social exclusion. The third, social integrationist discourse, SID, sees inclusion primarily in terms of labour market attachment. Her analysis indeed shows us how the meanings of social exclusion shift and change and how these permutations are reflected in different



policy implications<sup>13</sup>. However, her analysis is general and does not show the logic of each approach clearly.

On the other hand, Silver suggests another alternative to define the paradigms and sort out the cluster within the discourses of social exclusion. She identifies three paradigms which are named as monopoly approach, solidarity approach and specialization approach. Her analysis points out the ideology of each paradigm and illustrates how each paradigm responds to the rapid social change in the contemporary world. Different from Levitas's elaboration, Silver's analysis goes further. She provides the sociological background of each approach as well as their linkages and extension of classical theories. Her analysis is more profound and inspiring. Introduction of her analysis will be given in the following.

## **2.3 Three Paradigms of Social Exclusion**

### **2.3.1 Monopoly Approach**

Monopoly approach sees exclusion as a result of the formation of group monopoly. This approach is largely drawing on Weber.

It views the social order as coercive, imposed through a set of hierarchical power relations. In this social democratic or conflict theory, exclusion entails the interplay of class, status and political power and serves in the interests of the included (Silver 1995:68).

This approach sees "status" as a source of domination potentially independent of social class. Status, in short, is the primary group boundaries. According to Weber, the social action are motivated by three main areas. First is the "material and ideal interests". Second is the structure and culture. And lastly is constraint and autonomy. Meanwhile, status groups are manifestations of power relations; they claim social honour and esteem, and have their own consciousness, consumption patterns and style of life. Multiple forms of monopoly, such as material and legal, maintain the status group's exclusivity. This is well illustrated

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<sup>13</sup> For details, please refer to Levitas, R. 1998. *Introduction in The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*. New York: Palgrave

by Parkin's (1974) article, *Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation*. Social closure and usurpation, are the two strategies being used in control and protection of groups' resources among different groups. The usage of these strategies is a consequence of inherent groups' conflict. Social classes are similar to status groups since they can also exclude non-owners from competing for valuable resources. But there is not necessary to undergo this process in order to earn the social status.

In fact, Weber's most influential point is that, if the social closure of status groups creates monopoly and hence inequality, it does not follow that social classes are always status groups. Those who do not have to exchange in markets have power over the terms of exchange, i.e. a monopoly. Weber refers the term "closure" as a process of subordination whereby one group monopolizes advantages by closing off opportunities to outsider who it defines as inferior or ineligible. Race, language, social origin, religion, any convenient, visible characteristic can be used to identify competitor to be outsiders (Silver 1995:69). Restricting access to opportunities and resources enhance closure, thus allow insiders to maximize rewards. Since the group of insiders shares a common culture and identity, norms of group legitimate exclusion.

What's more, Weber also recognized that such social closure may cause the excluded individuals to react and resist exclusion. In Parkin's analysis, one of the possible responses is usurpation. He finds "dual closure" happening in the class formation. When the excluded groups successfully usurp in-group privileges, they may redraw boundaries to exclude other groups which are less powerful than they are. In this case, the monopoly paradigm does not assume that a society can include everyone and every group. Social closure is achieved when institutions and cultural distinctions create boundaries that keep others out against their will and are used to perpetuate inequality. The particular boundaries of exclusion may be drawn within or between nation states, localities, social groups or labour market



segmentation. Whatever the nature of the boundary, the overlapping or coincidence of group distinctions and inequality is the main argument of this paradigm. Although every social demarcation is at once a barrier and a level, paradoxically, the very barrier that demarcates class distinction also creates equality within class boundaries.

This approach assumes the possibility of a inclusive society. It is different from the Orthodox Marxism which denies the potential for true social integration in class-based societies. On the other hand, this paradigm believes the unequal power underlying more general group monopolies can be mitigated with inclusive “social democratic” citizenship. Hence, this belief generates discussion on citizenship in order to response the social exclusion.

In sum, base on Weber’s theory of social closure among status group, Monopoly approach perceives the exclusion as a consequence of status groups’ monopoly. Monopoly is basically an action of resources protection from outsiders. The boundary is drawn by common culture and identity which are norms legitimating exclusion as well. The solution of social exclusion, in general speaking, is to provide the complete citizenship, thus provides the basic identity and generates the idea of society as a whole in order to achieve social inclusion.

### 2.3.2 Solidarity Approach

Solidarity approach is rooted in French thought (Davoudi and Atkinson 1999). It views exclusion as a rupture of a social bond between the individual and society. The social order is the main mechanism to enhance solidarity. This approach adopts the Durkheimian approach that social order is regarded as external, moral and normative. It is grounded neither in individual, in groups, nor in class interest. The vertically inter-related mediating institutions facilitate a notional consensus, collective conscience, or general will that ties the individual to the larger society (Silver 1995:66).

Solidarity approach is less organic than humanist in its reconciliation of social interdependence and the feeling of belonging to the collectivity with the demand for individual fulfillment. It denies the liberal individualism, socialist class conflict and strictly political citizenship as sufficient basis of social integration. Silver describes that in the Solidarity approach,

Individual citizens are less bearers of rights than participants in a communal "civility", a public life of fraternity. Such moral unity and equality requires incorporating mediating institutions that might compete with the state citizens' loyalty...rather than accepting cultural and political pluralism, separate interests and memberships are reconciled and synthesized into a unitary whole (p.66).

As a result, this approach places heavy emphasis on the ways in which cultural or moral boundaries between groups socially construct dualistic categories for ordering the world. Exclusion both threatens and reinforces social cohesion. The inverse of exclusion is thus "integration" and the process of attaining it. This approach emphasizes attention on the exclusion inherent in the solidarity of nation, race, ethnicity, locality and other cultural or primordial ties that delimit group boundaries. It applies not only for analysis of citizenship, ethnic conflicts, and deviance, but also discussions of cultures of poverty and long-term unemployment. Silver also notes that it trends toward "flexible specialization in the political economy".

### 2.3.3 Specialization Approach

Specialization Approach focuses on the specialization due to the radical development in contemporary society. In fact, the rapid development causes several specializations being observed. That includes social differentiation, economic division of labour and the separation of spheres. And exclusion is regarded as the consequence of specialization.

It assumes that individuals differ, giving rise to specialization in the market and among social groups. It is thus individualist in method, although causation is situated not simply in individual preference but also in the structures created by cooperating and competing



individuals – markets, associations and the like. It thus conceives of the social order, like the economy and politics, as networks of voluntary exchanges between autonomous individuals with their own interests and motivations (Silver 1995:67).

Specialized social structures are consisted of separating and competing, but not necessarily unequal spheres, which become interdependent through exchange. And individuals voluntarily associate and form social groups. Meanwhile, shifting alliances among groups' members show differentiated interests and desires. The liberal model of citizenship emphasizes the contractual exchange of rights and obligations, and the separation of spheres of social life. Thus, based upon the above assumption, specialization approach points out that exclusion results from three conditions, 1) inadequate separation of social spheres; 2) inappropriate application of rules to a given sphere, and 3) freedom of movement and exchange across the spheres are restricted. Besides, because of the existence of separate social spheres, exclusion may have multiple causes and dimensions. Nevertheless, the same individual is seldom being excluded from every sphere. Nor social spheres and categories need to be in a hierarchical order in terms of resources or value. Only if "excluded" individuals have the right to move across boundaries, specialization still reaches the aim of protecting liberties and efficiency. Individual freedom of choice is based upon diverse personal values and motives for engaging in social relations. It would give rise to crosscutting group affiliations and loyalties, integrating the society. Exclusion can be viewed as a form of "discrimination" when the group boundaries obstruct individual freedom to participate in social exchanges. However, the liberal State's protection of individual rights as well as group and market competition impedes this form of exclusion.

Besides the above three approaches, Silver also mentions another approach, organic approach. It covers organic notions of society as composed of groups, which may categorize into functional, regional or ethnic. At one extreme this may take a state corporatist or fascist character – the State shapes the structure of civil

society so that groups, all of which have distinct functions, are integrated into an organic whole. At the other extreme, there are societies in which there are a joining together of constituent units, which maintain their autonomy and institutions, and share participation in political systems and bureaucracies. Between the two, a variety of intermediate pluralist models are built on the responsibility and duty of individuals to participate in societal institutions and associations. Potential conflicts between relatively autonomous groups are mediated by social institutions. The State acts to promote integration, ensure that responsibilities are met, and guarantee rights (Rodgers 1994).

However, Silver finds several weaknesses in organic model. First, it does not provide clear justifications for recognizing some groups rather than others. Second, it is ambiguous why vertical functional associations are privileged over horizontal, decentralized, participatory and membership organizations. Third, if functional groups are indeed granted autonomy, little can be done to prevent some groups - particularly those with initial power - from gaining control over others, undermining the presumption of organic harmony. Thus, inequality in civil society can also produce social exclusion. Lastly, while the State's concern with the integration of the parts of society can lead to top-down control of functional groupings, undermining their autonomy, dependent States cannot integrate multinational capital into national corporatist structures. Therefore, the definition of social exclusion in organic model differs from other models. She suggests that organic model should be seen as a further paradigm or family of paradigms for analyzing social exclusion.

In sum, I have briefly sketched out Silver's classification of major paradigms in the discourses of social exclusion. Firstly, the monopolistic interpretation associates social exclusion with the actions and interplay of powerful interests - multinational firms, government bureaucracies (and one might add, patriarchal and other entrenched interests and practices within civil society). Secondly, in the solidarism perspective, social exclusion associates primarily with the French



republican tradition of an essentially cohesive society and the fundamental equality of citizens. Thirdly, social exclusion associates with barriers to individual freedom in the specialization perspective. Social differentiation, the economic division of labour and the separation of spheres should not produce exclusion if individuals are free to move across boundaries and spheres are kept separate. It is clear that they attribute exclusion to a different cause. Each of them is grounded in a different political philosophy: social democracy, republicanism and liberalism accordingly. All three paradigms emphasize processes and concern to examine how people's lives are being affected by the inter-relationship between social institution and economic restructuring. They are cast in relief when contrasts with conservation notions that see social integration in organic, racial, or corporatist terms. They are also different from the neo-Marxist conceptions of the capitalist social order, which deny the possibility of social integration to begin with.

## **2.4 Remarks on Citizenship**

Following monopoly perspective, the solution of social exclusion is to enhance complete citizenship. This is the reason why scholars so concern about the citizenship fulfillment of excluded groups. Based upon Marshall's analysis, social exclusion is result of incomplete of citizenship. Excluded parties are apparently lack of social rights and raise issues of various exclusions. In the following section, I pinpoint Marshall's main argument and critics from others as well. Soysal challenges his idea of elements' sequence in the process of citizenship fulfillment. In contrast with Soysal's latest studies, I argue that Marshall's approach is more appropriate to the discourse of social exclusion.

First the main form of inclusion is to have a stake in power, to participate in decision-making in the political arena. Thus, the first criterion of participation is having citizenship, having the right to make the say. That explains the emphasis of the importance of citizenship entitlement in the debate of social exclusion. This

discourse actually extends Marshall's concept of citizenship. Most of recent discussions on social exclusion mainly emphasize the how the concept of citizenship exercise empirically, and specifically point out the discrepancies between the ideal concept and reality in a specific social context. However, the execution of concept should be seen as the consequence of the definition.

Citizenship is the basic identity of a social member. It draws the boundary between "we" and "others". Phongpaichit, Piriyaarangsanan and Treerat (1997) summarize up the term "social exclusion" meaning exclusion from rights or entitlements as a citizen. In their case studies of developing countries, they conclude that the problem of social exclusion happens mainly due to the basic rights of citizenship have generally not been codified in constitution which guarantees the rights of citizens. While, liberal individualist tradition, which permeates Anglo-Saxon thinking, sees citizenship as a social contract based upon the possession of equal rights by all individuals, and views social integration in terms of freely-chosen relationship between individual rather than a relationship between the individual and society (Gore 1995:2).

Marshall's writing on citizenship provides a classical and provoking model. He divides citizenship into three parts or elements. They are civil, political and social. By civil element, he suggests the rights necessary for individual freedom-liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts and the right to justice. In short, it concerns the legal rights of citizens. By the political element, he denotes the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body. By the social element, he means the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share, to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society (Marshall 1950:8). Without any one of these elements, it is not a full citizenship. Marshall



also stresses that “equality of status is more important than equality of income (Marshall 1950:33)”.

There is a crucial limitation with this way of thinking about citizenship in contemporary society. Marshall’s model does not get beyond a consideration of the extension of the franchise in representative democracy (Byrnes 1999). That results a relative neglect of issues of power in the current versions of the Marshall’s citizenship approach. The new school of citizenship seldom gets beyond the notion of the active citizen as the fulfiller of reciprocal obligations (Byrnes 1999:3). So if we extend the theme of Marshall’s citizenship approach in debates of social exclusion, we consequently neglect the autonomy of social actor, i.e. individual, in accepting or confronting their social situation, especially when they are under unfavorable situation. That certainly contradicts to the phenomenon of various minority groups’ establishment while nowadays most of them are aimed at fighting for a more favorable or friendly living environment for their own community.

Nevertheless, Marshall does provide a profound framework for analyzing the citizenship fulfillment. According to Marshall, sequence of completing citizenship should be first civil or legal rights, then political rights and finally social rights. In his model, rights are extended in stages to members of social entities that had previously been excluded from the polity, thus gradually transforming them into citizens (Marshall 1950). On the contrary, based upon studies of European guestworkers, Soysal argues that the Marshall’s sequence of membership rights does not fit the European cases. She finds that the economic and social rights are the first ones to be fully granted to migrant workers in European host countries. Political rights became part of the agenda much later (Soysal 1994). In other words, her case reverses the Marshall’s sequence of gaining citizenship rights.

In fact, the main differences between Marshall’s and Soysal’s model are the basis and legitimation of citizenship. In Marshall’s model, shared nationhood constitutes the basis of membership (Turner 1993). This nationhood may be

represented differently in various countries. It assumes a subscription to a political ideal, culture or ethnicity. For instance, many scholars have suggested that German citizenship as ethnic citizenship while French citizenship as civic one (Soysal 1996). Even so, it is still the shared nationhood that justifies equal rights and obligation. Hence, the basis of legitimacy for individual rights is located with nation state. On the other hand, the membership and rights are legitimated by the global ideologies of human rights instead of solely based upon the criteria of nationality in Soysal's postnational model. In that case, universal human rights substitute for national rights and universal personhood replaces nationhood. That rights and claims of individuals are legitimated by ideologies grounded in a transnational community, through international codes, conventions and laws on human rights, independent of their citizenship in a nation state (Soysal 1996). Obviously, the justification for the state's obligations to foreign populations goes beyond the nation state itself.

Moreover, their arguments are embedded in different social context. While Marshall's study is based upon the British case of formation of citizenship from eighteenth century to twentieth century, Soysal's research is more recent and focuses only on the twentieth century. The time period is crucial to their analysis. Marshall's arguments made at the time that formation of civil right and liberties of the individual was just began. His argument is made based upon the belief that civil liberties are necessary foundation for the emergence of political rights since only when the individual is recognized as an autonomous agent does it become reasonable to regard that individual as politically responsible (Marshall 1950). As a result, the advancement of political rights enables the organized working class to achieve social rights. On the other hand, Soysal states that when most Western states have already completed their nation building and the notion of social rights emerged in the twentieth century, Marshall's model is no longer applicable. Under the discourses of stressing universal rights and personhood, host states generally find it much difficult to deny the social and civil rights, "which directly linked to the



person, such as individual liberties and a minimum standard of living, to new groups of people even they are not entitled to the formal national polity (Soysal 1994:131)". In this context, social rights are hence more expandable in both scope and content. More importantly, it is less exclusive than political rights. Thus, European guestworkers are entitled to the social and civil rights earlier than political rights.

Soysal's model is inspiring. She raises the concern of recent changes in the basis and legitimation of membership. However, in the context of social exclusion, it is obvious that her model cannot apply. The excluded groups are apparently lack of social rights because of the incomplete political rights. And so, they often participate in organizational activities or political parties in order to fight for more social rights. After they have gained certain social rights, political rights are important to secure the former. In other words, the political rights is an instrument to gain and later secure the social rights in order to complete their citizenship. If so, political rights definitely have to come earlier than social rights in the sequence of citizenship fulfillment. And the case of the Nepalese community is an excellent example to illustrate this argument. It would be discussed in Chapter Six.

## **2.5 Unanswered Questions**

We have learnt that the term was introduced in the contexts of perceiving social exclusion as a process of social problem. It assumes that government has the obligation to combat it in order to enhance social cohesion and solidarity. For instance, promotion and enforcement of equality, freedom of individuals' movement and fulfillment of complete citizenship are basic criteria of inclusive society. They are obviously in the scope of government responsibility. In other words, the discussion basically focuses on the role of social agents and actors who execute social exclusion rather than the recipients (Silver 1995). Except for the well description of different aspects of exclusion over individual, the major limitation of this approach is neglecting the role and autonomy of individual, specifically the

excluded individual. Perhaps it underestimates the influence of excluded groups.

First of all, as I have stated above, the definition of the term “social exclusion” is quite open. Its definition depends on different social context at different time. Through the analysis of social exclusion, it provides idea of existing political culture and further understanding of the present social context. However, there is no local literature to identify the social exclusion against ethnic minority in Hong Kong. Hence, before I look at the individuals’ response to social exclusion, I will lay out their suffering in Chapter Four in order to seek for definition of social exclusion under Hong Kong’s social context. I identify four modes of exclusions in Hong Kong.

Secondly, the importance of dynamics between exclusions seldom attracts much attention. Most studies focus on the cause of exclusion rather than the interplay between exclusions. One of the features of the term mentioned by Rodgers is focused on process. Analysis of dynamics of exclusions should provide us a better clue about how the exclusions engage and reinforce each other. That is indeed the process of exclusion. That will be elaborated in Chapter Five.

Lastly, what is the role of the excluded individuals or the groups throughout the exclusion process? Are they passively being excluded? Or do they also participate in the process? Although the role of government is critical in the process of exclusion, the response of individuals is undoubtedly crucial. The consequences would be very different either individual passively or actively involves in the process. Through the interaction between government and public, i.e. excluded and non-excluded group, policy can be modified. The situation can be changed due to individuals’ responses in other words. Chapter Six will account for the process of the Nepalese citizenship fulfillment, particularly on political citizen rights. And that should be seen as the active response of excluded individuals to confront the exclusion. On the one hand, their response have arisen the government attention and initiated the negotiation process. On the other hand,



their internal problems have led them to another battlefield of exclusion. The discussion will show the significance of individuals' response as the mechanisms leading to their present situation.

In this section, we have discussed the major approaches and mainstream discussions on social exclusion. The discussion of "social exclusion" originates in European tradition which emphasizes the essential of social integration and solidarity. However, the term is widely defined as its multiple application under various social contexts and different focuses. In contrast with other similar terms, which are also used to describe the social disadvantages, social exclusion can be used as an umbrella approach, which covers their discussions and provides a multidimensional analysis framework. It includes political, economic and cultural aspects. It focuses on the process, social actor and social agents of social exclusion as well. Silver indicates three paradigms in the discourse of social exclusion: Monopoly, Solidarity and Specialization. The implication of her analysis is the advantages stemming from a social exclusion approach, depend on the particular frame of analysis. Silver's models help us to grasp the existing arguments of social exclusion from different approaches while the analysis of previous empirical researches give us a sense of main ingredients of social exclusion. What's more, scholars have suggested full citizenship as a solution of social exclusion. Marshall and Soysal hold different views on the sequence of citizenship's element. Referring the discourse of social exclusion, Marshall's approach is more appropriate. Yet there are questions being neglected, particularly the dynamics along exclusions, the responses and involvement of excluded individuals during the exclusion process. Throughout the discourses less attention has been paid to this aspect. In this paper, the case study of the Nepalese migrants is used to illustrate the social condition of Hong Kong. It reveals the areas of exclusion against them and the dynamics between exclusions. By chasing their history of citizenship fulfillment, it also shows the autonomy of individual in the sense of either resist or adapt is rather

dynamic and worth to have a close look.

## **2.6 Remarks on Methods**

The research was started at late December, 2000 and ended in November, 2001. There are mainly two types of research method in this thesis. They are 1) participant observation in local hubs, communities gatherings, functions and home visit with informants; and 2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with thirty-six informants. The former is mainly used for establishing rapport and gaining a clear picture of social exclusion against the Nepalese in Hong Kong. The quotations of this thesis are largely from interviews. This section discusses the application of these two methods as well as their limitations.

### **2.6.1 Participant Observation**

In the prior contact with the Nepalese community, participant observation is used to collect data and established the rapport with informants. After contacting one of the biggest Nepalese association, FEONA in the late December 2000, a pilot interview with its coordinator, Lekha Nath Koirala<sup>14</sup> is conducted and some general ideas about the community are gained. With Lekha's help, I met some key informants and got chances to join some major organized activities of the Nepalese community in Hong Kong, such as annual meeting of FEONA, cultural concerts and leisure activities. In total, I joined three Nepalese concerts and two barbecue parties. Meanwhile, I began to spend time on some local Nepalese hubs, such as Nepalese restaurants and shops in Yuen Long and Jordan. One Nepalese restaurant's owner permitted me to conduct observation during a two and half month from January to mid-March, 2001.

The participant observation of organizational life and frequent appearances in local hubs provided important chances of engaging in the Nepalese community

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<sup>14</sup> With few exceptional cases, pseudonyms are used in the thesis for protecting interviewees' privacy. For those exceptional cases, real names are given with interviewees' permission.



activities, experiencing and understanding their cultural background. More importantly, it also benefited in establishing rapport with informants and increasing my publicity in the community which was advanced me in requesting interviews later on. Fieldnotes were written after each observation. They are the supplementary data set of this dissertation.

Twenty-four-day fieldwork in Nepal from October to November 2001 were conducted. During the mentioned period, I accompanied informants to homeland visit. Valuable data was collected from the participant observation in the homeland visit. I observed and experienced their living and festival celebration with informants' families as I lived in their home. All these participant observations became important data to analyze their marginal status in homeland. Despite their shyness of being interviewed, language was the main barrier for in-depth interviews with informants' family members.

#### 2.6.2 In-depth Interview

Interviews were done from mid-June to early October 2001. I have totally conducted thirty-five interviews. Twenty-four are Hong Kong SAR ID cardholders and eleven are holders of dependent visa (Appendix 1). Snowball sampling is employed during fieldwork in reaching them. In fact, before carrying on in-depth interviews, the preliminary fieldwork i.e. participant observation allowed me to examine my conversational fluency in the field as well as locating the suitable interviewees. Most interviews took about one and a half hour. The longest one was last for more than three hours. Each interviewee was informed that I was a Master student of CUHK who was conducting a research on the Nepalese community in Hong Kong. A brief introduction of my research purpose and name card was also presented to each informant. Upon the consensus of the interviewees, the interviews were taped and transcribed all interviews.

All interviews were done in English. Before the start of interview, each

interviewee was asked for his/her language preference using in interview. Despite years staying in Hong Kong, the majority of interviewees were unable or unconfident to use Cantonese in interview. Only two interviewees chose to use Cantonese. Renuka chose Cantonese because of her illiteracy in English. Roshan chose Cantonese simply because that was his daily language. In translating those interviews from Chinese into English, I endeavour to preserve the exact wordings of interviewees' opinions.

During interviews, interviewees were encouraged to talk about their personal experience in Hong Kong. Topics covered in the interviews were broad, such as personal details, history of migration, employment experience, family background, living environment, relationship with the locals, involvement of formal and informal Nepalese organizational activities, leisure life, impression and comments on Hong Kong, and so on. Nevertheless, the ability of interview language constrained the length of interview.

### 2.6.3 Limitations and Solutions

According to Bailey (1978), the ideal type of participant observation is collecting data on nonverbal behavior involving sight or visual and via the other senses, such as hearing, touch, or smell as well. But this ideal type is too perfect and less practical in the realistic setting. It is imaginable that Nepali is the basic language used in the communication of both formal and informal Nepalese gatherings. Because of the illiteracy of Nepali, it was also unable to record the informal chatting between informants and other Nepalese. Instead, visible data were recorded. In most cases, translation from others were needed. But relying on translation is the risk of data distortion. Also, this paper neither could collect more trivial data nor go further exploration via their daily conversation with family members, relatives or friends. Nevertheless, numerous of participant observations in various activities do ensure the quality of data collection.



Language problem was encountered in the in-depth interviews, which finally constructed the major part of the data set of this dissertation. First, it is the most common excuse being given to refuse our invitation of interview. This is particularly obvious in inviting female interviewees.

*"Can I interview your wife? Because I also need some women interviewee." I asked Lalit when we were waiting for his wife to prepare lunch for us. He turned to his wife and asked in Nepali. After few sentences of conversation, he turned to me and said, "Sorry. No. She don't want because she does not know how to speak in English." (Fieldnotes on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2001)*

Originally, it is planned to interview equal numbers from both sexes in order to eliminate the gender bias in interviews. However, it was so difficult to invite female interviewees when they knew I the interview was conducted either in English or in Cantonese. Their excuse mainly was lack of confident in spoken English or Cantonese. One female interviewee even did not show up in the appointment intentionally as she was *"very afraid last time...I don't know English and just little bit Chinese. I am very afraid. I don't know much (Fieldnotes on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2001)"*. Therefore, it ended up having ten female interviewees in total 36 interviewees. This imbalance sample selection is due to practical language limitation. The length of females' interviews is also comparatively short because of their shyness.

Second, the English standard of interviewees is various. Some can speak very fluent English, such as Trilok and Shiva. Most of them can understand the question as it started with simple questions, which mainly concern with their daily life. Nevertheless even themselves admitted and alerted their weakness in spoken English.

*The interview was started at about 1:30p.m. and ended at 2:45p.m. When I started interview, I asked Arun if that was ok for me to tape the interview.*

*"It is ok. But the problem is my English is not good. We don't have enough vocabulary to express our thought, our feeling, our opinion," Said Arun. (Fieldnotes on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2001)*

In following chapters, my extensive direct quotations from interviewees' own wordings should be treated as an illustration of their spoken English standard. In fact, there was one case that we need to use translator almost for every question. In other cases were one to one interview. In spite of some obvious grammatical mistakes, interviewees were often lack of vocabularies to express their opinion and in-depth feeling. This also reflected in their short answers were given during the interviews. In that case, the interviewer had to be patient and kept probing possibility of further answer. Yet, there were cases that the reveal of the misunderstanding during the interview only when processing the transcripts.

Lastly, the language barrier raises a critical and sensitive question: how to achieve in-depth interview if the interviewees cannot even understand interviewer's question, let alone the fact that interviewees are unable to express themselves well by the interview medium, i.e. English? First of all, I would like to stress the significant of using English and Chinese in interviews. It was well alerted the difficulties of achieving in-depth understanding due to language problem before conducting any interview. The insistence of using either of these two languages simply lies on the belief that interviewees' standard of English or Cantonese actually indicates their ability of communication and integration into Hong Kong society. The problem encountered in interviews certainly reflects the problems that interviewees have to go through whenever they interact with the locals. After all, Cantonese and English are the most common language used in the ethnic minority groups<sup>15</sup> in Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, several measurements were employed to minimize the problem so as to ensure the quality of interviews. Firstly, simple words were used in questions. If the interviewee failed to understand the question, it would either be repeated or modified or simplified. Secondly, repeating interviewees' answer in

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<sup>15</sup> See *The Characteristics of the Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong in Thematic Household Survey Report No. 4, 2000*.



order to confirm the answer. Thirdly, in most cases, interviewees' own words were used to make the next question in order to further probe his or her in-depth feeling or opinion. Fourthly, pauses provided rooms for interviewees to digest the questions as well as to construct their responses. In fact, from experience, silence during interviews does create tension between interviewer and interviewee. And those tensions results in positive reaction from interviewees, such as give more elaboration for their answers. Lastly, translation from third party was used. In fact, interviewees were often encouraged to answer on their own, as much as they can say. But there was time that they were not really confident in English, they requested for translation. Then, either interviewee's husband or close friend was the one who did translation for both questions and answers. That ensures the trust between interviewee and translator. There were less than five cases that interviewees required translation from a third party.

In conclusion, application of both participant observation and in-depth interviews are useful to explore much of the Nepalese community in Hong Kong. The homeland visit with informants enhances better understanding and provides insightful ideas for social exclusion in Nepal. Repeated observations and abundant interviews minimize the possible problem due to language barrier.

## Chapter 3 The Nepalese Community in Hong Kong

*I am working for money, for my sons. (Diwash)*

### 3.1 Historical Background and Settlement Pattern

The majority of the Nepalese population in Hong Kong traces their roots back to the Gurkha<sup>16</sup>, who are Nepalese and being recruited into the British army. According to FEONA, the Gurkha soldiers were sent to Hong Kong since 1948<sup>17</sup>.

After the independence of India, the British Gurkha Army moved to Hong Kong in 1948, being monitored from the British army headquarter in Malaysia. And when Malaysia became independent in 1964, the British Gurkhas moved to Hong Kong. That was the origin of Nepalese migration in Hong Kong. (FEONA's homepage, 2001)

British mainly recruited four Tibeto-Burman groups, namely Magars, Rais, Limbus and Gurungs for the British army. These four castes later compose the major body of the Nepalese population in Hong Kong.

#### 3.1.1 Deployment and Community of the Gurkhas – Inside Military Camp

The end of British rule over India was a milestone in the history of the Brigade of Gurkhas. When India became independent, some 8000 British Gurkhas who served in India originally moved to Hong Kong. The first Gurkha battalion was based at Norwegian Farm Cam Camp (later renamed Cassino Lines), near San Tin in the Northern New Territories. They were “posited regularly in Hong Kong during the 50s and the 60s, though at that time the majority still remained based in Southeast Asia, engaged first with suppressing the communist-led Malayan Emergency from 1948 to 1960 and a later involvement in the confrontation with Indonesia after the Federation of Malaysia was established (Wordie 2001).”

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<sup>16</sup> The term is not generally used in Nepal. *Lahure* is the common Nepali word for a soldier serving in foreign armies (Leung, 2001; Farwell, 1985). Lotter mentions that the word *labure* also refers to migrant workers as well.

<sup>17</sup> Information of the Nepalese in Hong Kong is limited. My sources are either provided by FEONA or learnt from Lotter's thesis and newspapers. Lotter (1997) states that the Gurkha troops had deployed in Hong Kong since 1955. But she fails to provide supportive evidences for her statement.



According to Wordie, the Brigade of Gurkhas left Malaysia in 1969 and the last regular battalion to serve in Singapore departed in 1971. In the same year, three Gurkha battalions were permanently stationed in Hong Kong. Since then, Hong Kong was the troop's home station until 1997. Dipendra was an ex-Gurkha who served over fourteen years in Hong Kong. He witnessed the independence of Malaysia and recalled the troops' transfer to Hong Kong.

*And when, during that time, our headquarter was in Malaysia, middle of the, just North of Juraba. So when all the British give the independent to Malaysia, then after their agreement finished, they have leave there, Malaysia, Singapore. So and in 1970, we came here and our headquarter also moved to the Parapalm, and we stayed there. Just next to Tuen Mum. Just 28 km from here to Parapalm Camp, our camp. Near the Castle Peak. (Dipendra)*

In fact, Hong Kong was used to be the center of operations for the British Brigade of Gurkhas from 1969 to 1994. Large population of Gurkhas was sent to the territory, and so Hong Kong has become the major migration destination of the Nepalese consequently. The main duty of Gurkhas in Hong Kong was 1) patrolling the borderline between Hong Kong and China; 2) catching illegal immigrants on the border; 3) guarding Shek Kong Vietnamese detention center; and 4) chasing smugglers in speedboats. Besides infantries, there were also the Gurkha Signals, Engineer and Transport regiments stationed in Hong Kong. There was sophisticated division of labour in the camp.

*I was in the Gurkha engineer. So I was just working as fencing, making the fence, or making a blocking the way to get in the immigrant. So all the infantry, they used to do the border duty, all the patrolling. They work stopping to come, the illegal immigrant groups, inside there. They work, during that duty they have to stop (illegal immigrant). We were just putting everything, making the accommodations for the infantry, and we making a room, and making fencing. We were just doing as engineer job. (Dipendra)*

Various types of training were conducted. Firstly, tough tactical trainings were conducted continuously around the Hong Kong hill areas. Secondly, Cantonese was taught to Gurkhas in order to facilitate their daily duties, which might

have connections with the locals, especially when patrolling the borderline<sup>18</sup>. Hence, the ex-Gurkhas have certain ability of spoken Cantonese, which benefits them to pursue career, such as security guard, in Hong Kong after retirement.

*In the army we learn some basic Cantonese, like 唔該, 身份證 (excuse me, your ID card please.) when we worked in the boarder, this is very important. We can ask for the ID card. We also learn 早晨 (Good morning), when we see those people entering Hong Kong. They teach us those basic words. We say to them, especially those old people. They did not go to school, so they don't know English. (Parbin)*

Thirdly, practical training was also included and that also equipped some ex-Gurkhas surviving skill for future life. Those are latent function of the military training. For instance, being an ex-Gurkha engineer, Dipendra was used to have different types of training courses. He learnt much skill from those trainings.

*We used to do lot of courses. Yes. First, main engineer training. Second, we used to train some extra, some extra courses, like mechanic, like a surveyor, like driver, operator, like that, carpenter, welder, like these. (Dipendra)*

From 1969 to 1994, the Gurkhas and their families had made up the majority of the Nepalese community in Hong Kong. Yamanaka (2000) estimates more than 10,000 Gurkhas and their families are in Hong Kong during that period<sup>19</sup>. The Gurkhas did not have an automatic right for bringing their families to Hong Kong for the duration of their posting until they reach senior ranks, for example sergeants or above. Junior Gurkhas soldiers were allowed to apply “family permission” for up to two and a half year out of their fifteen years of service. Those commissioned into more senior ranks and to Queen’s Gurkha Officer status may have their families with them for longer (SCMP, 10 March 1995). Meanwhile, there were certain constraints to limit the amount of Gurkhas families inside the military camp.

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<sup>18</sup> However, Cantonese was not taught in the Gurkha schools because the media language in Gurkha schools was Nepali. Hence, none of the Gurkha posterities I interviewed had learnt Cantonese in their early age, when they were in Hong Kong.

<sup>19</sup> The precise amount of Gurkhas in Hong Kong during that period should be found in the government files, unfortunately, I was unable to access those records. More information is not available.



Particularly, that related to the supply of accommodation.

*We have limit of the married quarters, so we won't allow to have every time. So we, we used to get about six years time one family union, so we allow to have a family quarter, then we bring. Otherwise is, everybody wants to bring here. But there is not enough married quarter, so cannot. (Dispendra)*

Inside the camp, a small community was formed. There were adequate facilities such as radio station<sup>20</sup> and schools for children<sup>21</sup> (Farwell, 1985). There was also a small group of Nepalese civilians accompanying the troops. They were schoolteachers of the Gurkha schools and “businessmen”, who sold the goods from Nepal to soldiers in order to dilute their homesick and made souvenirs for the army as well<sup>22</sup>. This group of Nepalese and their families were also lived and enjoyed the facilities both inside and outside the camp. Roshan was one of them. He was born in Nepal and moved to Singapore since his father worked for British army there at that time. His father was a jewelry maker who “helped the British soldiers to make the jewelries and gold” and “helped the Army to make the premium gift items”. Later, he got the chance to live in Hong Kong when he was thirteen years old. He extended his staying here after his father retired from the army.

During that period, the Gurkhas were quite isolated from Hong Kong society since they lived in the barracks, which mostly located in some remote areas such as Kam Tin, Fan Ling, Sun Tin and Sai Kung<sup>23</sup>. Fundamentally, they were physically excluded because of their roles as employed soldiers. To some extent, they were

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<sup>20</sup> The Nepalese service of the British Forces Broadcasting Service was started in 1971. It broadcasted three hours of Nepalese and Hindi music each day on Shek Kong military base in New Territories. It was closed on 27 October 1996 (SCMP, 27 October 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Education was provided for the Nepalese children in order to prepare for their eventual return to Nepal. The schools were set up in the 1970s. There were seven Nepalese schools, including primary and secondary schools, locating in different Gurkhas military camps for the children of the Nepalese soldiers and civilians. They used the Nepalese school syllabus, teaching in Nepali and English. The aim of the schools was to replicate the Nepalese system as far as possible and there was a strong emphasis on the Nepalese culture. The last school was closed in 1995 (SCMP, 10 March 1995).

<sup>22</sup> The size of this group is not recorded. Meanwhile, the Nepalese civilians enjoyed more freedom than the Gurkhas. One typical example is the children of Gurkhas must go to the Gurkha school inside the camp while the children of civilian can choose either go to Gurkha school inside the camp or English school outside the camp. The former school taught based upon Nepali syllabus while the latter was based upon British syllabus. The opportunity of choosing two different syllabuses actually further divided the Nepalese posterity in two groups institutionally.

the same as overseas workers who did not entitle to citizenship in Hong Kong. Additionally, they were prohibited to leave the camp unless during the holidays or day-off with arrangement in advanced.

*During the working hour, we cannot go. But we can go Saturday, half day, Sunday, full, holiday, we can go, we can go everywhere. Sometimes, we have public holidays, many public holidays. The English summer holidays, winter holidays and also our festivals... we also get the Chinese festivals, also like Dragon Boat festivals. Yes, we used to get a lot of holidays. During the holiday, they will be nominated, they will detail who are to do the duty around the camp. They are not allowed to do, so who are free, they can go. Yes, everybody. (Dipendra)*

Even though they had the opportunity to go out, every activity outside the camp was being arranged and closely monitored. They acted in a group. Trilok spent his childhood in the barrack. When I asked him to compare the life between living inside and outside the barrack. He told me this:

*The army life is different. Everything was arranged, right? You want to go to shopping, they have bus to go. And from the supermarket, they bring you back to the camp, and everything is done in that way. You go to school, you come back to home. And they bring it back to you. (Trilok)*

Due to the impact of handover, the number of Gurkhas had already been reduced since 1992 when the Britain announced a cut in the number of Gurkhas in its army. The Training Depot Brigade of Gurkhas at Malaya Lines, Shek Kung closed and relocated to Church Crookham in Hampshire, southern England in 1994 (Wordie 2001; Leung 2001). The last Gurkha Battalion was the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Gurkha Rifles, which was sent to UK in November 1996 and left only a few Queen's Gurkha Engineers behind (Lotter 1997). The last crew finished their duty in Hong Kong and transferred to other places when China resumed its sovereignty over Hong Kong on 1 July 1997.

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<sup>23</sup> Informant told me that when he was here, there were seven Gurkha camps in total.



### 3.1.2 Composition and Population of the Nepalese Community - Outside Military Camp

Long before the Gurkhas troops moved out Hong Kong completely, the Nepalese community was silently formed outside the military camp at the beginning of the 90s. After the troops were sent to other places, they remained here and the community develops steadily. Now it becomes one of the top ten groups in Hong Kong. When I asked the coordinator of FEONA (1999-2001) about the composition of the Nepalese community in Hong Kong, he told me that “*the one third of the population is the permanent residence, the rest figure either dependent or worker visa holders*”. Precisely, I identify five groups of Nepalese in Hong Kong according to their connections with the Gurkhas, who are the origin of the Nepalese migrants. Also, I introduce them in the sequence according to their appearance in the territories as well.

#### I. Ex-Gurkhas

As part of the contract, soldiers were not allowed to stay but had to return to Nepal after retirement. Although there were army resettlement courses which designed to provide skills that would assist former Gurkhas to reintegrate into Nepal successfully, they were increasingly irrelevant as few really wanted to return to Nepal, one of the poorest countries in the world<sup>24</sup>. When the Gurkhas are retired from the army, some agencies or security organizations quickly recruit them from Nepal. That is why many ex-Gurkhas just went back to Nepal for a very short period and returned to work in Hong Kong almost immediately (Lotter 1997). Since employers can easily verify the military discharge papers<sup>25</sup> of a former soldier, this is the chief reason that the Gurkhas are employed by the security industry.

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<sup>24</sup> The World Bank said in 1995 that the nation's average monthly wage was the equivalent of HK\$135.

<sup>25</sup> According to informant, every ex-Gurkha has one red book which records when they join and resign the army, their position, rank, countries they have been visited and country they are from, and so on. If they lost it, they will not get the original one again. They will only get the white paper from U.K. But that is not the same as the original one. In short, the red book is the identity

Also, these companies employed not only the ex-Gurkhas from Hong Kong, but also from worldwide such as from the Indian army. An informant told me that some companies also hired people from the Nepalese army and police forces as well in recent years. No wonder the pool of potential employees hired to work in Hong Kong can be as huge as some 30,000 in 1999 according to *The Economist* (1999).

Jardine Securicor Gurkha Services is so far the largest employer of the ex-Gurkhas in Hong Kong<sup>26</sup>. It has employing the ex-Gurkhas to work as security guards since 1993. The current figure is around six hundred. The spokesman of the company comments that the ex-Gurkhas “who have lengthy service are obviously ideal recruits for the ranks of private security companies. They speak English, many speak fluent Cantonese if they have serviced in Hong Kong and their army discipline and training prepares them for a job that can be as frequently boring as it is sometimes dangerous and challenging (SCMP, 11 March 1996)”. Many security service companies hold the same opinion to hire Ex-Gurkhas to work. Furthermore, Hong Kong does not have regulations on the quota of overseas workers but the length of contract period is restricted. Mostly the contract of overseas workers is on two-year basis.

What’s more, as part of the military training, the ex-Gurkhas are eventually equipped with some useful skills that benefit them for job hunt after retirement. For instance, fifty ex-Gurkha engineers were hired to work on the Tsing Ma suspension bridge cables in 1994 (SCMP, 13 June 1994).

## II. Children from the Gurkha Camp

Since the Gurkhas could apply family permission and bring their families to Hong Kong for two-and-a-half year, eventually, there were Nepalese babies born in the camp. By virtue of the tripartite agreement between Nepal, India and Britain,

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document of ex-Gurkha.

<sup>26</sup> Jardine Securicor Gurkha Services is well known because its name repeatedly appears in SCMP reports, for example reports dated 13 June 1994 and 23 November 1994 are specifically about ex-



both soldiers and families were prepared – in terms of education and post-service training – for eventual return to and resettlement in Nepal. The Sino-British Joint Declaration signed in 1984 has granted the Right of Abode (ROA) to those children who were born before 1 January 1983 in Hong Kong irrespective of their immigration status. Hence, the “line boys and girls<sup>27</sup>”, who were born between 1948 and 1983 here, automatically acquired first the right to land in Hong Kong, and later, the ROA. They can apply for the “Permanent Hong Kong Residence ID Card” and are eligible for the British National (Overseas) Passport (BNO). This law was amended on 1 January, 1993. Now the applicant needs at least one parent with permanent residence in Hong Kong to be eligible for the permanent ID card.

Since the British Army did not keep records of children born in barracks to soldiers’ wives, nobody really knows how many Gurkha children were born here. However, the Foreign office estimates the figure at about 20,000 (SCMP March 8 1998)<sup>28</sup>. This is fairly big group indeed. Yet, this number does not include the children of civilians who were eligible for the ROA as well.

It was mainly school teachers from the Gurkha service children’s schools first realizing they were legally entitled to permanent Hong Kong ID cards, so they did not have to return to their homeland (Wordie 2001). And this news spread among ex-Hong Kong people, the Nepalese returnee influx steadily accelerated since then. According to informants, most Hong Kong born Nepalese did not know that they would be entitled to apply for Hong Kong citizenship and the BNO due to the ROA until 1992. FEONA’s former coordinator, Lekha mentioned that, *“these people applied the period of, the big period of, the big number of Nepalese applied in 1993 until 1997.”* Most of them knew their right from friends or family members. Only one interviewee, Suresh told me that he heard it from broadcasting in Nepal.

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Gurkhas employed by the company.

<sup>27</sup> British officers use this term to describe the Nepalese children who were born at the place their fathers serving for the army.

<sup>28</sup> The number of Hong Kong born Nepalese has not been registered. Also, the immigration office does not release the number of applicants for Hong Kong residence with the Nepalese nationality.

All interviewees came to Hong Kong before 1997 (Appendix 1). Apart from the widespread news of ROA, the Nepalese rushed to Hong Kong from 1993 to 1997 because of economic and political reasons. First, in the period of economic bloom in Hong Kong, there were so many different large-scale projects (such as ten core projects of Rose Garden Project) going on since the government promoted the Rose Garden Project in 1992. Many job vacancies were available at the time especially in the construction field where attractive income could be earned. Informant told me that they could earn as much as thirty thousand or more per month during those years. Thus, many Nepalese came here actually for the “gold rush”. This explains the majority of the Nepalese working in construction field in that time and until now. Secondly, there was a rumor that Chinese government might change the policy of ROA after 1997. As a result, it is not surprising to learn that five interviewees came to Hong Kong in the middle of their college education. They rushed here to claim their rights before it expired. And later, they abandoned their education in Nepal and chose to stay here. In conclusion, despite the economic push factor in Nepal, fear of losing the right after 1997 is the key factor.

### III. Relatives of the Gurkhas

Relatives of the Gurkhas can apply either tourist visa or dependent visa to come to Hong Kong. The former type was widely used by Hong Kong born Nepalese before they realized their ROA. In fact, this group of people appeared in Hong Kong as early as ex-Gurkhas. The Nepalese were previously granted visa-free entry, i.e. a 30-day tourist visa on arrival in Hong Kong. Since there was no regulation to restrict the frequencies of visiting, it was common to enter Hong Kong with the tourist visa repeatedly enhancing “long stay”. One interviewee told me that he used the tourist visa to come to Hong Kong for at least two years. However, this visa policy changed again on 27 October 1998. The immigration Department accused that many Nepalese arrived in Hong Kong as visitor and then tried to



change their status with forged documents or 'fictitious claims'<sup>29</sup>. Now, the Nepalese is required to apply for a visa from the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu, Nepal. For the sake of short-term family reunion, the change of visa policy became more difficult and burdened the applicants. That's why Mira complained about it.

*That time is very easy. No need to enter visa, we can come Hong Kong and then visit and then go back Nepal. Very easy. Now is not like that. Now it change rule in Hong Kong government. Now is need to apply the enter visa. Enter visa, apply the enter visa is also problem. Many things showing. Need to show them. Then, we don't want to, we don't want to bring my children because very problem, we need to go to work. Many times need to go to immigration also, and we have not that time. (Mira)*

Meanwhile, more Gurkhas relatives choose to apply dependent visa after realizing its advantage of eligibility over permanent residency after seven years continuous living. But it is more complicated to apply. It is given to groups containing close relatives of the permanent ID holder. The possible dependants are spouses, parents over fifty years who have no other means of support, and children under 21. After staying in Hong Kong for more than seven years continuously, they can apply for the permanent ID card as well. For anyone who wants to apply dependent visa, his/her sponsor must submit the job letter and monthly pay slip with enough bank balance to sponsor the applicant. The income level of sponsor is taken into account of granting application. Nevertheless, each case is dealt with on its merits. In spite of the trouble of application, many Nepalese come to Hong Kong with this type of visa. In this thesis, I have interviewed eleven dependent visa holders. For them, dependent visa is the only way to have family reunion as well as longer staying in Hong Kong.

#### IV. Others: No Connection with the Gurkhas

There is a small number of the Nepalese entering Hong Kong by tourist visa (mainly entrepreneurs and traders) and contract visa (domestic helpers and contract

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<sup>29</sup> 102 Nepalese were arrested for overstaying or working illegally and 50 cases were involving the

workers.) Lotter (1997) also mentions that the tourist visa is a common means for the Nepalese street traders to enter Hong Kong. But there is no any documentation showing either the number or history of this group in Hong Kong. According to Lotter, there were about 424 domestic helpers in 1997. FEONA estimated about 600 domestic helpers in 2000<sup>30</sup>. If both figures are correct, it shows that the increasing rate of the Nepalese domestic helpers is quite steady. However, compared to about 144,000 Filipino domestic helpers currently in Hong Kong, this size of Nepalese domestic helpers is very small. The basic rights and responsibilities regarding employment of foreign domestic helper are specified in the standard employment contract. The Employment Ordinance is also applicable to foreign domestic helpers. There are two crucial rules regulating domestic helpers' stay in Hong Kong. First, they are not allowed to change their work to anything other than domestic work. Second, they are only allowed to stay in Hong Kong for maximum two weeks after the completion of their contract or after termination by any reasons.

## V. Illegal Immigrants

There is also an undeniable number of the Nepalese using illegal methods to come and stay in Hong Kong. Despite overstaying, Lotter states that at least three common types of "creative" methods use by the Nepalese. One is to buy forged birth certificate, which prove one's birth in Hong Kong. Second is to buy the original papers. Her informant told her that "all the documents are real- only the persons are different (Lotter 1997:16)". The last one is fraud marriage. I heard people talking about these methods during my fieldwork. However, there was a practical problem to explore further about these issues since people would not dare to risk telling me. People also refused to further discuss their legal status in Hong

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Nepalese using forged passports or travel documents in 1997.

<sup>30</sup> However, one informant, who used to be domestic helper, told me that the number should be more than 2000.



Kong. Anyhow, as the Hong Kong Immigration Department is aware the practices of these “creative” methods, the regulations have become stricter. The cancellation of free entry policy is a good evidence. Meanwhile, applications for any types of visa are carefully investigated and this leads to a longer processing period. Under this circumstance, size of this group perhaps is under controlled and minimized. Thus, it is sensible to believe that this group only makes up a small proportion of the Nepalese community.

### **3.2 Recent Population Trends**

The actual number of the Nepalese population in Hong Kong is rather unclear since the reports from different government departments give various figures. *Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under Article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* is the only official document reporting the total Nepalese population in Hong Kong before 1999 in detailed. According to the report, the number increases significantly among the years. But in fact, the Nepalese is not even mentioned as a separate ethnic group in the 1996 population. Needless to say the information about other features of this groups such as sex and age are also being neglected. The HKAR has started to show the Nepalese population figure since 1998 as its population is among the top ten ethnic population in Hong Kong. In 1998 and 1999, the Nepalese is the 10<sup>th</sup>-largest ethnic group in the SAR. Although its total population drops in 2000, it ranks the 9<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group. Based upon the physical count of arrival and departure records, immigration department suggests another set of figures of the Nepalese population in Hong Kong. But its figure does not represent the total number of foreign residents who have residential status here. The last source is from Hong Kong 2001 population Census, which is also the first time the question on “ethnicity” being included in Censuses/By-censuses. Based upon the above sources, I construct Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 The Nepalese in Hong Kong according to different government reports

As at end Of the year	Permanent Resident	Temporary Resident	Total 1	Total 2	Total 3	Total 4
1990	162	178	340			
1991	92	221	313			
1992	68	353	421			
1993	182	727	909			
1994	806	1,125	1,931			
1995	3,259	2,220	5,479			
1996	5,518	4,490	10,008			
1997	7,589	6,692	14,281			
1998	8,434	8,891	17,351	17,400	17,400	
1999	8,420	9,261	17,681	17,700	17,700	
2000				17,200	15,800	
2001				17,430	17,430	12,564

Note: (i) Total 1: sources from Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under Article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

(ii) Total 2: sources from the HKAR<sup>31</sup>

(iii) Total 3: sources from Immigration Department<sup>32</sup>

(iv) Total 4: source from Population Census 2001

However, there is a general belief in the Nepalese community that the real size of population should be greater than the official statistics. FEONA's former coordinator, Lekha suggested that government figures just showed the permanent residence. He believed that including all types of staying in Hong Kong, all together the figure must be about 45,000 to 50,000 in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the updated figure reported by FEONA's official homepage is about 35,000 in 2001. Many interviewees believed that the Nepalese population size should be around 30,000 to 50,000. However, none of them could tell me clearly their ground of claims. Apparently, the various statistics show the lack of accurate census of the Nepalese population in Hong Kong. It is plainly showed that government ignore the existence of the Nepalese community. Notwithstanding, Lotter explains the

<sup>31</sup> Since the figure of the HKAR is almost the same as source from Immigration Department, it is my belief that they are from the same source. However, the reason of their difference in 2000 is unknown. It can be misprint in the HKAR.

<sup>32</sup> I enquired this figure personally by email. The figures of foreign population are derived from a physical count of arrival and departure records maintained by the Immigration Department. Such figures are a breakdown of the number of persons by their nationalities physically present in Hong Kong on a particular date (usually the last day of the month). They do not represent the total number of foreign residents who have residential status here. The figures also vary from time to



huge difference between general belief and government figures because there are large amount of Hong Kong born Nepalese can be found entering Hong Kong with various forms of British (and possibly other) nationality and are therefore among the UK nationals in Hong Kong. So there are more ethnic Nepalese than the amount government announced living here.

The above figures provide us a general idea of the size of the Nepalese community in Hong Kong. Compared with other ethnic minorities, the population of the Nepalese community is surely rather small in size. However, it is more important to look at their staying status rather than their total population. As the executive officer of HAB said, status of residency among the Nepalese is one of the reasons that HAB would like to focus on and put more efforts to help the community. There are mainly five categories in the Nepalese composition: Ex-Gurkhas (contract visa), children were born in the Gurkhas camp (ROA), relatives of the Gurkhas (dependent visa), no directed relation with the Gurkhas (contract visa) and illegal migrants. As far as this thesis concern, the main focus is on the permanent ID and dependents visa holders who have entitled the Hong Kong citizenship and this legal status shows that their possibilities of long staying. Besides, they compose the majority of the community as well.

## **Chapter 4     The Problematic Community: Modes of Social Exclusion Against the Nepalese**

*I think it is difficult, very difficult to stay in Hong Kong. (Keshab)*

Social exclusion is a multidimensional concept (Gore 1995; Room 1995; Berghman 1995; Geddes and Benington 2001). To identify and analyze its dimensions, we should look at the dimensions of the social world where exclusion takes place. Cultural, political, economic and civil arenas are four broad spheres of social life in which social exclusion and inclusion are manifested and hence, can be analyzed and understood. This chapter aims at providing a substantial empirical picture of social exclusion against the Nepalese community for the analysis in Chapter Five and Six. Thus, the scope of social exclusion will be illustrated in the succeeding four sections. In order to enhance better understanding of excluded people, a specific definition is given to social exclusion from each arena. Here would concentrate on illustrating the situation instead of the dynamics between exclusions. The latter part will be analyzed in next chapter.

### **4.1 Cultural Exclusion: Inaccessible Cultural Capital**

Although there is no concrete definition of cultural exclusion shown in past studies, cultural capital has been treated as an essential element for migrants to integrate into the host community. Here the cultural exclusion refers to being excluded from certain crucial cultural capitals which facilitate integration in host community and access to social mobility. Based upon the fieldwork, there are mainly three types of cultural exclusion against the Nepalese community. They are language, skill and knowledge of the host community. Originally the Nepalese migrants have obtained all these types of cultural capital that are supposed enough to support their life in Nepal. However, these capitals become useless after they immigrate to a new place since the whole environment is different. Cultural exclusion occurs when those required cultural capitals are inaccessible. In this section, I focus on the modes and degree of cultural exclusion against the Nepalese



Community in order to analyze the accessibility of cultural capital. The succeeding chapter about dynamics among modes of exclusions would explain more about its accessibility also.

#### 4.1.1 Language

Language is the medium of communication. It is impossible to integrate smoothly into the host society without communication. Thus, the ability of language application is crucial in determinate the extent of exclusion. According to *Thematic Household Survey Report No.4: The Characteristics of the Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong (CEM)*<sup>33</sup>, the most commonly cited difficulty living in Hong Kong was language<sup>34</sup>. Irrespective of Chinese dialects, Cantonese and English are regarded as the most common languages in Hong Kong<sup>35</sup>. The standard of informants in these two languages would be discussed in the following part.

##### I. “*They have different tones. Maybe the tone is very difficult.*” - Cantonese

According to CEM, the fluency in spoken Cantonese of the Nepalese is relative poor. In fact, no one claims his/her ability of spoken Cantonese is fluent. Only 4.8% states that they have only reached the conversational level. 16.2% speak the simple words and 79% cannot speak at all. Compared with other ethnic minorities who also participate in the survey such as Indians and Pakistanis, the Nepalese has the highest illiteracy rate of spoken Cantonese. Additionally, the Nepalese is the only group that all interviewees could neither read nor write Chinese at all. In

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<sup>33</sup> This is the first, and so far, the only government survey concerning the demographic profile of non-Chinese and identifying their needs and difficulties in Hong Kong. However, results from the report remain doubtful. Several ethnic minorities associations accused the inaccuracies of the report after it published. For details, please refer to SCMP dated 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2001. Regarding to the Nepalese, the report estimates that there are only 8100 (2.9%) Nepalese in Hong Kong. I doubt this figure. This figure is not supported by any other government statistics either such as statistic of immigration department.

<sup>34</sup> In the survey, it was cited by 68% of the persons of ethnic minorities aged fifteen and over who had encountered difficulties.

<sup>35</sup> *Population Aged 5 and Over by Usual Language, 1991, 1996 and 2001* from 2001 Population Census. Meanwhile, Putonghua is surprisingly less common than other languages despite the fact

other words, the Nepalese suffer the most serious cultural exclusion, particularly spoken Cantonese, among other ethnic groups.

I focused on the speaking ability mostly when I asked informants for their knowledge of dialect. All interviewees agreed the importance of spoken Cantonese in Hong Kong. For them, ability of speaking Cantonese is good because *“it helps a lot and makes life easier”* (Upendra). After all, *“this is the local language”* (Parbin). Meanwhile, nearly all of them regarded language as the main obstacle of living in Hong Kong. Bindiya’s answer is a common one.

*Q: what is your main difficulty living in Hong Kong?*

*Bindiya: most properly is the language problem. If I learn the Cantonese, it is better for me. Because some place, if we go to some place, it is quite hard to manage, right. Most properly is the language problem, other thing is ok.*

However, most of them claimed their standard of spoken Cantonese is rather low. They can only speak a little bit, which means they only know some simple words. Like Sankar can only understand some common phrases. Those are probably being picked up from daily life experiences.

*Q: can you speak Cantonese?*

*Sankar: cannot, little bit, like the 快D (be quick), 你好嗎(how are you) , 早晨(good morning) like this. Some simple words.*

*Q: how about listening?*

*Sankar: listening. Sometimes, little bit I can understand. Like somebody say Happy New Year, like that.*

Ability of spoken Cantonese disregards with their staying periods in Hong Kong. Trilok, 24 years in Hong Kong, also declared his standard of spoken Cantonese only at the level of *“I can speak some”*. Notwithstanding, he can go to the wholesale market and do the bargaining in Cantonese by himself. In fact, most interviewees have stayed in Hong Kong range from four to seven years. Only few of them can speak fair Cantonese. For instance, Bhabin, six and a half years in Hong Kong, cited his Cantonese standard, which is commonly found among the



Nepalese.

*Just little bit I can understand. But I cannot speak still. (Bhabin)*

No interviewee has learnt Cantonese ahead either when they were in Nepal or during their early years in Hong Kong. Seventeen interviewees were born in Hong Kong. Some had spent their childhood in Hong Kong, like SaLaxmi stayed here until she was 12 years old<sup>36</sup>. However, the early life experience did not advance them in learning Cantonese since they lived in barracks where Nepali remained the dominant language besides English. Cantonese was only taught to soldiers for the advantage of carrying out duty. Thus, it is not surprising to find some ex-Gurkhas (like Dipendra, Parbin and Bholanath) could speak much Cantonese as that was part of the training when they serviced in Hong Kong. From the linguistic perspective, Nepali belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family<sup>37</sup>. It is another type of language logic that is totally different from Chinese. Many of them expressed the difficulties in learning Cantonese and worries that the locals might misunderstand. Suresh gave me a concrete example of difficulties in speaking Cantonese.

*It is hard. Like "九" means nine, right? "九" also means "搞掂", finish, right? And also "搞錯" means stupid (should be meant "mistake"). This is I think (he paused for a second) I think little bit difference, difficult I mean. (Suresh)*

Meanwhile, most interviewees gradually have picked up some simple words from daily life after they lived in Hong Kong. Most of them did not take formal course of Cantonese, they *"just like look and learn"* (Laxmi). More precisely, they *"learnt it from experience"* (Upendra). Given that it is unavoidable for them to communicate with the locals at many occasions, they have chances to pick up some Cantonese. Most obvious case is shopping in local market. Actually, it is the only place that some interviewees speak Cantonese with others. Laxmi could speak little Cantonese after staying here for five years. She communicated with

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<sup>36</sup> Appendix 1 shows the age of different interviewees when they were sent back to Nepal.

<sup>37</sup> For further discussion, please refer to Parmar's *"The Gorkhas"*, p.11

shopkeepers in market in Cantonese. There were times that they did not understand what others told in Cantonese. However, they have their own trick to solve the problem and learn the language at the same time. Sankar shared his trick with me. He learnt vocabulary from those experiences.

*When I going to the vegetable shop, 幾錢啊?(how much?) I can say 幾錢啊?(how much?) ask for the price. Sometimes I don't know... sometimes it is very difficult for me to catch the words, so I just showed the money. Then he keeps the money and returns the coins. Then I know the price. (Sankar)*

Moreover, working place is another venue where they pick up the language. In most cases, they learn it through communication with colleagues or foreman. Yogan never learnt Cantonese seriously. He learnt it from the daily communication with his colleagues. He told me that he could only speak the commanding words.

*In the working site, I need to, I tried to talk to Chinese Shi Fu, but I can learnt it. I can talk in Cantonese...like this at first, when I worked with Chinese people in Yuen Long site. They said evening in Cantonese, I don't know. They said it, I said I don't know. They repeated it in English and Cantonese. Like this, I tried. Like this I learnt. (Yogan)*

Therefore, when I posed the question of their ability of spoken Cantonese, many interviewees gave me the similar answer as Machhindra who stated “*I know working time using language*”. In fact, colleagues are their Cantonese teachers. Bhabin, working as a waiter in restaurant, learned Cantonese from work and colleagues as well.

*Just with my colleagues, just try to speak in Cantonese which one normally, when we take up some of the orders, just little bit I can understand. But I cannot speak still. I understand a little bit from the menu. (Bhabin)*

Different types of company provide various chances for the Nepalese to learn Cantonese. To large extent, that really depends on the composition of colleagues. Both Dhan and Karna worked with a team of Chinese people separately before. They both pointed out this kind of occasion was the quickest way to learn and improve Cantonese.



*I work in the Tsang Ma Bridge, many, many Chinese. And then 上邊、下邊 (up and down) (he pointed up and down.) Like this, every time they tell me and do. It is not talk in English. Every time talk to Chinese...one group is all Chinese and only me also work there. I learn Cantonese, and then I can speak a little bit. (Karna)*

Learning from work is an effective way for some Nepalese to pick up the host language. Keshab shared his friends' experience that *"they never go to study, but they only work. Everyday they talk, talk, talk. They can speak very good Cantonese."* Roshan and Pawan also started to learn and improved their spoken Cantonese through their work. Among the few, they could speak rather fluent Cantonese. Indeed, work composes the element of "force them to speak". As the night captain of shop assistants in Wellcome, Ambar led a team of two Chinese and five Nepalese to work cooperatively. He regarded his work "forcing" him to speak Cantonese.

*Everyday we have to work. We have to talk in Chinese. Because others, in whole Wellcome, there are so many Chinese, in the daytime and nighttime. And they don't speak English, so we don't use English. We have to, must speak in Cantonese. (Ambar)*

However, working place, under the circumstance of heavy workload but limited time, is definitely not an ideal place of learning quality language. Some respondents have learnt the foul language without knowing the actual meaning from their colleagues' conversation. Sometimes, they have misunderstood the meaning as well. At the same time, not everyone can apply Cantonese successfully in work even when the situation needs. Diwash admitted that he was poor at both Cantonese and English. Being a foreman of nineteen to twenty people including four were Chinese, he tried hard to communicate with them but in vain. In that situation, he often placed order by demonstration of work instead of verbal communication.

*Q: how do you tell them (Chinese) how to work?*

*Diwash: just example, I am going to the Chinese friend. I go to first I work, this work, and then same this work.*

*Q: you show them how to work first?*

*Diwash: yes, show. First I show you how to work, and then you*



*work the same. So this Cantonese. I want to learn Cantonese, but this is very hard... the tones are different.*

On the other hand, it is not necessary for some jobs to speak in Cantonese. It really depends on what kind of people you work with or work for. Trilok worked in Indian restaurant for many years. He argued that it was unnecessary to speak in Cantonese in his case. That is why his Cantonese did not improve much in the last 24 years. Bindiya also shared the same opinion with Trilok. She works in a German Company while most of her colleagues and customers can speak quite fluent English. English becomes their alternative of communication medium instead of Cantonese.

Only four interviewees have taken the formal Cantonese courses. However, none of them improve much from the courses. Keshab took nighttime course in YMCA, but he only finished level two since level three was too hard for him and he was lack of practice. He always worked with people who could speak English with him, so he had little chance to practice and to improve his Cantonese.

*I studied there Cantonese, and then when I go to work at daytime, you know. And then because English people can only speak English, so we speak English not Cantonese. Also the Chinese people, they can speak English, so we can, I can't have time to practice Cantonese, you know. (Keshab)*

Pawan once took a three-month Cantonese course in Hop Yick Center<sup>38</sup>, Yuen Long. However, the content of the course could hardly attract his attention. Once again, same as Keshab's opinions, Pawan also emphasized the essential of practices in daily life instead of learning in classroom only.

*This is very hard to do so, you know. When you don't face the people, you cannot, not only the people, whenever you don't face anything, you didn't know how is it. If there is fire, and you don't teach them, how can them know that is hot. You must face it... Learning you know what is heat, but you don't know this is the heat if*

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<sup>38</sup> It is known as mini-Chong Qing since it is the ethnic hub in Yuen Long Center. It is a four-floor commercial center where many ethnic minorities businesses locate inside. Pawan owns a small shop selling the Nepalese groceries and renting videos opposite to the center. In fact, the area around the center has gradually developing as local hub for ethnic minorities in Yuen Long. As the population of ethnic minorities in Yuen Long is increasing, the area is expanding as well.



*you didn't try. (Pawan)*

Meanwhile, Mira is a successful student who takes Cantonese course. Before I met her, her friend had already told me about her good spoken Cantonese. She got her first job in a Cantonese Learning Center as helper. For the sense of need and location convenience, she took Cantonese course there at the same time as well. Later, she even became the Cantonese teacher of other latecomers. Still, she could only taught them some simple words only.

*Mira: I learning the Cantonese there three months. Then after the three months, my Nepalese friends, when just come to Hong Kong, just in the Hong Kong, then I learn them.*

*Q: you teach them?*

*Mira: yes, yes, I teach them the Cantonese because simple, simple. Simple words, simple sentences.*

Besides formal courses, some of them tried to learn by themselves. Sarmila did not sign up any Cantonese course but self-learn through listening to tapes and using books. Not to mention the difficulty in learning pronunciation, the process of learning is rather time consuming.

*I just try to learn by book and tape. But it is very hard. (Sarmila)*

In short, while Cantonese is the dialect in Hong Kong, but the Nepalese's standard of spoken Cantonese remains low. Very few Nepalese can speak it fluently. It is more common that they can speak little Cantonese. It depends on their experience of applications. Most interviewees learnt it from daily life experience. The length of their staying in Hong Kong does not have strong correlation with their ability of spoken Cantonese. Likewise, their work is a more important factor which affects their standard. Thus, some of them do not learn much Cantonese as it is not necessary for their work. However, considering the constraints of working environment and their colleagues who are also potentially their Cantonese teachers, the quality of language they might learn is questionable. As a matter of fact, learning Cantonese is a difficult task for them. Even though some of them have taken some formal courses, their standard does not improve

much. Practice is a crucial factor of improvement.

## II. *"We don't have enough vocabulary to express our thought..."* - English

English is another common language that the Nepalese use in Hong Kong. As I have mentioned, some informants' inability of spoken Cantonese is because English is their alternative. Sometimes, people also tend to use bilingual in order to establish communication when they cannot simply use monolingual.

Referring to the survey of CEM, standard of English including spoken, reading and written is also showed. For the fluency in spoken English, 40.9% Nepalese claim that they can speak fluently while 56.6% state that their spoken ability is only at conversational level. And only 2.5% cannot speak English at all. Both reading and written ability of the Nepalese show 94.3%, which is relatively high comparing with other ethnic groups such as Pakistanis which is only 26.4%. Nevertheless, as the survey only seeks for yes/no answer in the ability of reading and written question, it provides only vague picture. It is difficult to judge the actual standard of interviewees' English in both aspects. The answer of yes definitely should not be treated as individuals having good standard of either reading or written English.

The standard of interviewees' English is stated in Chapter Two. Interviewees' English standard is various. Yet, as they were confident to accept the invitation of interview and able to finish at the end, they at certainly have reached to a conversation as standard except for few cases need the translation. Based upon the fieldwork, their standard relates to their educational background and continuous practice.

Although Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, surprisingly most Nepalese immigrants in Hong Kong have quite good education attainment<sup>39</sup>. As

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<sup>39</sup> I suspect that is because the majority of the Nepalese in Hong Kong having the Gurkha family background. Comparatively high income is one of the attractions for the Nepalese to join British army instead of seeking other occupations in Nepal. Having a family member in British army can surely improve the living standard of family. Meanwhile, accompany of high income, British army also provide other benefits such as pension which ensure the life of retirement. It is more likely that Gurkha families are able to put their children in school.



showed in CEM, more than half (53.3%) interviewees have attained the secondary or matriculation level while only 10.2% have primary level or less and 36.4% have the tertiary educational background. Apart from four interviewees did not disclose their education background, the rest showed the similar distribution of education attainment as the survey (Appendix 1). Only one interviewee had no schooling at all and one finished at primary four. The majority finished either the secondary or matriculation level. Two finished the tertiary education while two pursued Master degree including one has two Master degrees.

Most respondents finished schooling before they came to Hong Kong. Nonetheless, it is difficult to judge interviewees' English level by only checking their school attainment. After all, Nepali educational system and standard is different from Hong Kong. Generally, students start to learn English since primary four when they are about eight years old in Nepal.

*Sankar: I was in the government school. In our time, we started English in standard four.*

*Q: standard four? Does that mean Primary four?*

*Sankar: yes, yes. Like the A, B, C, D, the alphabet, starting the alphabet from the standard four.*

Renuka left school at Primary four. She never learnt English before. That explains her inability of using English. However, although Amrit and Yogan did not mention their educational attainment in the interview, their educational attainment can be estimated from their previous professions in Nepal. Both of them worked in school. Amrit taught English in primary school while Yogan was headmaster of a high school. In fact, Amrit started to learn English when he did his primary school in Singapore Gurkhas school. Both of them spoke fair English from the impression of interview.

Ekraj, obtaining two Master Degree in Commence, speaks fluent English. He attended the school in India where being considered as an ideal place to have good



quality schooling<sup>40</sup>. Pawan is the youngest interviewee. I learnt his fluency of English simply from the interview. Unlike others, he was very expressive in the interview. He attended the boarding school in Nepal. Camala implicitly told me the differences between government schools and private schools (also named boarding school) when she explained the women's poor English standard. The English standard of government schools is comparatively lower than private schools while the village school is poorer than the city school.

*Village school is poorer than city school. We have, in city areas, we have so many good schools, private schools. But in village, there is no private school. They have to go to governmental school. Governmental school in Nepal is very poor. Just they teach them the Nepali, not English... All these ladies, they came from mountain areas, they cannot speak fluent English. They can speak, but they are not practiced. Almost all the ladies, they came from mountain areas, so they cannot speak English. (Camala)*

However, Kopila disagreed with Camala. Kopila learnt English when she went to the government school in her village. From interview, I have to say, her English is better than some interviewees who attended secondary school in city, in terms of vocabularies usage and fluency.

*Q: then how did you learn the English?*

*Kopila: in the school, we also have English subject also, yes. After, after primary, we have English. But I think, when I was in Nepal, I learnt before that time because we read the book, we did our exercise, we did our homework, we read the grammar, everything...in local Nepali school. But one of our teachers is very, strictly he wanted, that's why we must be learnt English.*

As a result, for some interviewees, school attainment cannot really tell their ability of spoken English. Bhabin explained the reason behind was the quality of the education in Nepal. And from comments of Kopila and Camala, I conclude that the standard can also be various even among government schools.

*And in Nepal, the, even they study in Nepal, but the quality or the*

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<sup>40</sup> Whenever I discussed about education in Nepal with my key informant, he repeatedly mentioned good schooling in India. According to him, many Nepalese who have strong financial support like to attend school in India since the educational system, facilities and quality of teachers are better than in Nepal. That is why the Nepalese generally believe that people who attended Indian school speak good English as well.



*experience are quite low. That's why it is very difficult. (Bhabin)*

Machhindra and Diwash have reached the secondary school level before they came in Hong Kong. Both of them frankly admitted their poor English before interview. For Machhindra, a translator is used. For Diwash, we had to skip some questions. In their cases, their education attainment does not imply their ability of spoken English. Instead, practice is more important. Both of them are lack of practice after they graduated from school. Surya did not attend school because of family matter. He learnt English by himself. For him, practice and previous working experience are the most influential factors for him to learn English.

*I did not learn English in school, no. I learn it by myself at home...When people speak English, I was really, really interested. So I start to learn. But of course, my English is not very good. Just for communication. I know it is not very good. It is not in the standard...I buy some books, practical books, and I learn it by books. And after that when I joined travel agency, every time I got people from other countries, like British and American. And I need to talk to them, because I am working. (Surya)*

Upendra, Bindiya, Sarmila and Surya also worked in the field where they needed to use English most of the time. Their job nature and the working environment also affect their ability of spoken English. For instance, Surya was a waiter in a theme restaurant in the Peak. He needed to speak in English in his job when serving customers. However, he complained that his working place did not provide much chance for him to improve English.

*In the restaurant, there is no standard English. Because my English is not improving now in Hong Kong...Because no chance to talk to people who speak in English, when I talk to Nepalese people in Nepali. And when I work with Chinese people, I must talk in common English, easy English. So that way, my English is not improving...It is sometimes we have no chance to talk to them. Just hi, hello, bye. Like that. (Surya)*

In addition, there are cases that some Nepalese did not enter school in Nepal because they did not return to their homeland with their family. Their stories are

totally different from those who had returned. Roshan and Trilok are examples. Different from Gurkha children, Roshan was able to study outside because he was from civilian's family<sup>41</sup> instead of Gurkha family. He studied in St. George School, Hong Kong. The school was also an Army school but mainly provided for British children. Later, he had further his studies in USA. His educational background surely granted him fluent English. Trilok was educated in Gurkhas school, Hong Kong. He did not further pursue his studies after that. Instead, he joined the restaurant business, which provided him chances to practice and improve English. For businessmen like Trilok and Shiva, they used English as their daily communication medium. Both of them did not disclose much about their educational attainment, but their standard is revealed in their interviews. Besides, Shiva has foreign business partners as well. They enjoy the advantages of speaking fluent English.

In sum, even though English is an alternative to Cantonese to establish communication with the locals, the Nepalese still have difficulties in speaking it. English is being taught since primary school. Although most of them have considerably high educational attainment in the Nepalese educational system, their English standard cannot be totally reflected from it. The type of school they have attended affects their standard. It is more related to their continuous practice in their job and daily life. Again, their occupation shows strong affinity with their English standard as well as Cantonese Standard. Overall, talking about the standard of these two language, noticeably, their English is better than Cantonese. Their choice of English as interview medium is the best evidence indeed.

#### 4.1.2 “*We are all not with skill.*” - Skills

Skills, as part of surviving knowledge, are cultural capitals that assist migrants to settle in the host state. Whether their skill can apply in the host society or not,

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<sup>41</sup> His father was jewelry maker working in the army that time.



leads to various status of settlement and exclusion. Here I mainly emphasis their surviving skills in the economic sector. Language surely is crucial consideration for most types of work. However, working in less documentary fields, practical skills are more important. As I have discussed language above, in this section I look at their practical skills specifically.

Half of informants come to Hong Kong right after or before they finish their schooling in Nepal. In other words, they probably do not have sufficient skills or knowledge in working. What's more, Nepal's major economic activity is agriculture. More than 90% of the population are subsistence farmers operating outside the cash economy (Finlay, 2001). When the Gurkhas return to Nepal, they are back to the farmer's life as well. It is my personal experience that even in the capital, Kathmandu, people have fields in front of their house. It is not surprising to hear someone from city of Nepal but working as a farmer. Vividly we cannot use the western concept to understand the meaning of city in those developing countries. Many interviewees told me that their only working experience is helping the family to work in the field.

*Everybody, like this, how to grow rice, how to, I learn in school, and then after that I go to home, I work in the field, it is farming, the agriculture is farming in Nepal. (Karna)*

Karna described the construction work for him was just like something what "you see this before in the film". No wonder Udeep and Arun were very surprised when they ended up working in construction site at first. Keshab expressed his feeling of "strangeness" when he had to work in construction. That was something distant from him when he was in Nepal. Like most of the Nepalese migrants, he did not acquire any skill before he came to Hong Kong.

*It must be very difficult because mostly our Nepalese people, they are low, because we never see the building machine, we never see the...like some construction site, you know, we never, have been there...We just study and go straight home and go to school. We never go to big construction site... never do the construction work. But when we come here, then we see everything. We are all not with*

*skill. Mostly we don't have any skill before. We just come to Hong Kong. (Keshab)*

Even a simple work can reflect the cultural difference and skill lag. In spite of all, they are from nation where has totally different cultural background and practices. Renuka worked as a restaurant helper now. Before that, her former working experience was only helping in housework. Her experience of how to sweep in Hong Kong is not extraordinary.

*In my village, we did not swept like this. We sweep like this. (she leaned forward a bit and showed me how to sweep.) But here, the broom is so large. It is different. So they taught me how to sweep...They taught me. I did not know before. Really, I did not know anything before. (Renuka)*

On the other hand, even some of them came to Hong Kong before they finished schooling, there are also few cases that people can apply what they have learnt in school. Suresh studied mechanical engineering in college. He learnt the skill, which facilitated him to work as welder in Hong Kong. Different from most Nepalese construction workers, he enjoyed his work since that is something same as what he learnt before.

While some informants do have working experience in Nepal, it is really uncommon as Machhindra has four years experience in construction field previously in Nepal. Most of them worked in unrelated field, and thus they could not apply their experience and skills in Hong Kong. Like Sankar got his first job as carpenter in Chek Lap Kok. Before he worked in the textile industry for ten years. For him, carpenter was just a conceptual job.

*Q: carpenter? You knew how to work as carpenter?*

*Sankar: no, I don't know. Actually I don't know. (Both of us laughed.) But first time I, I saw in Nepal. Some carpenter also in our country, in our factory. I have no practice, but I know a little bit idea.*

Amrit and Yogan worked in educational field in Nepal. Their professions could not apply in Hong Kong because of different professional requirement here. Amrit did not obtain any specific skill. He ended up working in the construction



site as labourer. On the other hand, Yogan had vocational training and acquired vocational skills in Nepal. And that helped him a lot in job hunt comparing with Amrit. At least, he worked as skilled labour and earned more income than Amrit.

*I first found as welder. Because I had vocational training in Nepal.  
So it could be used in Hong Kong, but not in Nepal. (Yogan)*

Lalit and Arun also worked in government agriculture department in Nepal. Both of them had worked there for more than 10 years. Now Arun is a bamboo-scaffolding worker. However, he experienced the hardship of adapting to a new working field in Hong Kong before.

*Arun: before I did not have any experience about this site before.  
So but this is also new for me.*

*Q: were you surprised when you need to work in the construction site?*

*Arun: yes, really...In the first month, it was really difficult for me to move from the high level work to the bridge, that later I solve it, I, I automatically work.*

On the contrary, Lalit was well aware and informed the situation in Hong Kong. He took six months welding training intentionally before he came to Hong Kong. He worked as welder in Hong Kong now.

*So many my friends was here...Then they tell me if you come to Hong Kong, you must be get the skill works, either you cannot, you cannot earn money, you cannot find the easy job. Before I was in Nepal, I cannot do the work, the construction work, I never do the construction work. It is so, I think I have the difficult to work here, then I thinks I must be learn some skill. It is easy for the, than the labour worker. (Lalit)*

In fact, acquiring skill is similar with learning dialect. It also requires chance to learn and practice. People can pick up the skill they need once they get the opportunity in the work. They eventually learn the skill from colleagues and supervisors. Surya gave an example as being a carpenter. He mentioned what he observed among Nepalese workers when he worked as carpenter previously.

*They never seen the electrical machine. They do not know how to do the measurement, the design and how to fix it. They were unlearnt. Until they got the job, they learnt by Chinese people or Nepalese people. (Surya)*

In a nutshell, skill is an important cultural capital for migrants to settle in the host community in the economic aspect specifically. In the case of the Nepalese in Hong Kong, they face problems of either inadequate skill or skill inapplicable. Regarding skill as a cultural capital to assist the settlement, respondents have troubles in various levels. For the group who were student before coming to Hong Kong, their obscurity was obvious because of inexperience. For the group who had working experience, they suffered from inapplicable of their skills. Nevertheless, for the group who were well prepared, they enjoyed a much easier start. It is true that workers eventually learn the skill from experience as they do in the language. For instance, Keshab started as a general labour when he worked in the construction site of Chek Lap Kok. But he learnt the welding skill there. Now he became skillful that helped him a lot in searching job.

*Now I have the skill there, license and I have experience, you know. In Hong Kong, I have five years experience. We can, we can, some of the companies if they have vacancy, we can try there easy because they will see we do that and our experience. (Keshab)*

#### 4.1.3 *"I don't know any, I didn't hear anything about Hong Kong."* - Knowledge of the Host Community

Knowledge of the host community is another type of useful cultural capital for migrants to settle in a new environment. It reflects the preparation of migrants before they emigrate. However, generally most interviewees only have rough idea about Hong Kong. I repeatedly heard simple description like *"Hong Kong is a developed place"* from interviewees when I asked them about their knowledge of Hong Kong before they came here. Despite having relatives in Hong Kong, many of them did not hear much about Hong Kong from their relatives. Bhabin came here to join his father. Even though his father had been here many years, Bhabin did not hear much about Hong Kong from him.

*Before I came here, I don't have any, I didn't hear anything about Hong Kong, because just I hear it is a very big city, we hearing like that. It is very developed city, just we hear like that. But we never*



*thought we would work like this. (Bhahin)*

Many of them expressed their shock when they came here and realized the situation different from what they knew or expected. Firstly, the idea of work shocks them the most. The division of labour is very different in Nepal, particularly in the attribute of gender. Being a female, Mira never expected to work in Hong Kong. She was shock when she realized that she had to work here. It explicitly shows their cultural shock in arriving the host community as well as their shortage of practical and psychological preparation before they immigrate.

*I am very surprised that time. When I come to Hong Kong, then I understand Hong Kong situation...many friends already come in Hong Kong that time. I talking them my friends, then they said, we are, we are come in Hong Kong then need to work...need to find a job, then I am surprised that time... Because in Nepal women no need to work, then come in Hong Kong, we need to work. (Mira)*

Moreover, the difference between two places on the idea of work reflects their divergence on the concepts of family division of labour. That does not only show at gender dimension, but also illustrate by children's timing of joining the workforce. Pawan got the first job of his life in Hong Kong when he was about 19. He was "so afraid to face it" as that was different from the Nepalese culture, which he used to live in.

*In our culture, nobody has done job you know. No many people will do the job. No need to work hard, no need to do this, like that. Just, we don't have self-depend, you know. One of the family member, just father, he do the job and he collect all the money, do this, like that, and he just spend with the children. They don't need to do the job...until my age, I think, I just saw few people, little amount people they do the job, who is in need, is poor...but no labour need a lot of people to do...just a little bit. (Pawan)*

Upendra shared the same feeling as Mira and Pawan. Although he expected to work, he did not prepare to work in the way that others Nepalese were working in Hong Kong. He only expected to work in an easy job after he got his ID card. However, according to his observation, most Nepalese worked in uneasy jobs particularly construction work. He worked as a security guard. Keshab and

Ambar came to Hong Kong in the early 90s. What they heard about Hong Kong was different from other latecomers. They only knew about the work in Hong Kong instead of their ROA. Additionally, they mostly heard information about Hong Kong from their relatives who were Gurkhas living in the barrack that time. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, the barracks were distant from host community and the Gurkhas were prohibited from outside activities except certain conditions. Hence, the Gurkhas did not know much about the host community as well. The accuracy of information that they provided for relatives in homeland is questionable. No wonder some early comers also showed limited knowledge of the host community when they arrived.

*Because my uncle, they are still in the army that time, you know. If we want to work then, ok, we look for you this job like this, you know, they told me. And then I come here. (Keshab)*

Besides, many Nepalese decide to immigrate to Hong Kong simply based upon the information they heard from others, i.e. relatives and friends. Again, the accuracy of those information is in great doubt. People only discovered the discrepancies between what they heard before and what they experienced after arrive.

*That time, nobody has got the ID card, just came for business, for, just for visit...People said that we can find job here, but not like this supermarket, and office, and restaurant. That time many Nepalese worked in garages...It is very hard job. (Ambar)*

It is not surprised that people had false expectations when they came here as they did not have adequate information about Hong Kong at the beginning. The idea of Hong Kong was so vague for them.

*I expected this is Chinese place. Yes, I think this is Chinese place, real Chinese place. I found so many other nationalities people here, you know. American, English, Indian and Pakistani. It doesn't feel like Chinese place. (Ambar)*

On the other hand, Ekraj is among few people who intentionally study about Hong Kong before he came here. Perhaps that relates to his educational



background. As he met some Hong Kong people when he was studying in India, he started to have much interest about Hong Kong. Later, he also realized his ROA in Hong Kong. He was concerned about Hong Kong's future before he came here. Nevertheless, he knew much on the academic sense instead of practical sense.

Inadequate knowledge of the host society is also shown in the way that they do not know how to access the local resource to improve their situation or standard of life. One significant example is the job hunt process. Most interviewees find their jobs by assistance of friends or family relatives. Even though, the job-hunting service of Labour Department is free of charge, few of them mentioned that they used the service before. Instead, many of them seek help from agencies, which usually charge expensively. Renuka paid \$1000 for an agency who introduced her a part-time job with monthly salary \$5000. Bhabin stated some agencies asking for one month pre-pay. This high charge rate actually violates the Employment Agency Regulations in Hong Kong<sup>42</sup>. However, many Nepalese have no idea about this regulation especially they are so eager to be employed but lack of sources. For instance, Kusum usually found job through agency because “*that is easy*” according to her. What's more, the situation can be even worse when the job is insecure. They may suffer from double exploitation. As Bhabin mentioned:

*If find the job through the agency, just pre-pay one month salary, something like that. And may be after 2 months, just fired from the company. That's problem in Hong Kong. (Bhabin)*

Among interviewees, apart from those continuous to live here after their parent retired<sup>43</sup>, many of them came back to Hong Kong without adequate ideas about Hong Kong. Many of them just had a general idea, which mainly concerns about

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<sup>42</sup> According to the regulation, the maximum commission which may be received by an employment agency from a job-seeker should not exceed 10% of the job-seeker's first month's wages he / she received after he / she has been successfully placed in a job.

<sup>43</sup> Trilok and Roshan are examples that continuously live in Hong Kong through out the years.

their right of abode and job opportunities. There are cases that the Nepalese came here with false hope and expectation. It is surprising that some of them even did not know the working situation in Hong Kong given that many of them mentioned that job opportunities was their main purpose of rushing to here. Lack of knowledge about the host community not only leads the cultural shock at the beginning of arrivals, but also causes them to be more dependent on villagers and enhances internal solidarity in the community to some extent later on. Nevertheless, the discussion of in-group inclusion is outside the scope of this thesis. I will not go further discussion about it.

I have defined language, skills and knowledge of the host community as the three main aspects of cultural exclusion in the Nepalese community. The majority of interviewees showed their disadvantages in possession of these cultural capitals before arrived the host society. After all, few of them had clear knowledge of Hong Kong before they migrated here. Eventually they did not have much preparation and planning ahead. It is true that migrants can eventually can pick up and accumulate some of these capitals. However, the acquiring process and quality is generally in great doubt. They may take much longer time to acquire knowledge or skills, which may not improve their life much positively. For instance, most interviewees did not know Cantonese before they came to Hong Kong. Few of them joined the formal learning course. Many of them just learnt it from day by day experience and work. Their learning progress is slow considering the time they have been here. Besides, quality of the language can be bad as their source of learning is no good. For the working skill, most of them experienced the hardship when situating in Hong Kong's economic activities at the very beginning. While some of them just remained as less skilled labourer, some of them did learn skill later in order to advance their career. However, the truth is that despite the economic reward, there is no much difference between the former and the latter in the sense of working environment and condition.



4.2 Economic Exclusion: 4D work

Economic exclusion is easy to understand as it is mainly related to economic activities. Therefore, this part I concern Nepalese’s economic activities, precisely their occupations. Scholars have noted that immigrants’ occupations are concentrated at so-called 3D jobs i.e. dirty, dangerous and demanding (Malheiros 2000). Based upon my research, I would like to add the fourth D, i.e. devalued. In fact, these four terms do not simply focus on the monetary rewards. Instead, they concern more on the job nature, which would be the focus of this section as well.

Surprisingly, the Nepalese, who are economically active, are not earning less. According to CEM, there are 82.7% Nepalese economically actively. Nearly half of them (43.8%) have elementary occupations, 39% are clerks, service workers and shop sales workers, craft and related workers, 16.8% are managers and administrators, professionals and associate professionals. Although the definition of each category is rather board, it provides us an easy categorization of the complicated division of occupations. Nevertheless, the survey does not include the figures of self-employed and employers. It is well known that ethnic minorities are well penetrated in different types of business in Hong Kong<sup>44</sup>. Base on interviewees’ economic participation, I divide them into five groups accordingly.

Table 4.1 Categorization of Interviewees’ Occupation

Categories	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5
Number of interviewees	6	17	4	3	5

Note:

- 1. Type 1: elementary occupations; Type 2: Clerks, service workers and shop sales workers, craft and related workers; Type 3: Managers and administrators, professionals and associate professionals; Type 4: employer; Type 5: jobless

<sup>44</sup> The typical examples are the Indians in trading business and the Nepalese in street vendor and food industry. White, B.S. (1994) has a thick description about Indian traders in Hong Kong in his book *Turbans and Traders: Hong Kong’s Indian Communities*. The Nepalese street vendors are active in Temple Street. Lotter’s paper has mentioned it as a creative way for many Nepalese to extend their stay in Hong Kong. However, there are outside the scope of the this paper because of they mostly use the visitor visa and maintain the temporary staying status. What’s more, the Nepalese are active in restaurant and small shop business. According to an informant, many Indian restaurants are in fact owned by the Nepalese. To be named as Indian restaurant is a commercial gimmick since Indian food, especially curry, is well known by Hong Kong people. After all, the Indian community has longer history than the Nepalese community in Hong Kong does. Besides, it is difficult for outsiders to distinguish these two groups’ cuisine anyway.



Different from the government survey, the majority of interviewees are concentrated at type 2 (Appendix 1). Many of them are either waiter/waitress or skilled labour in construction industry. In addition, I approached some unemployed people as well as employers. There are cases that one person participating in more than one field. I categorize them according to their time allocation.

The following table shows the figure of monthly personal income. I combine the tables from CEM and my own data in order to show their differences.

Table 4.2 Monthly personal income (HK\$)

Range	A	B
<6,000	6 (17.1%)	600 (11.2%)
6,000-9,999	6 (17.1%)	3,300 (62.1%)
10,000 – 14,999	9 (25.7%)	
15,000 - 19,999	5 (14.3%)	
20,000 – 24,999	3 (8.6%)	900 (15.4%)
25,000 – 29,999	1 (2.9%)	
≥ 30,000	5 (14.3%)	600 (11.2%)
Median Monthly Personal Income (HK\$)	10,000	

Notes:

1. A is distribution of my data.
2. B is from *The Characteristics of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong*, Table 5.3b

Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 have provided a general idea about respondents' economic status. Most interviewees' monthly personal income is more than median monthly personal income. However, these statistical figures can hardly tell the real situation of their economic condition, such as their jobs' nature, working environment and condition, and so on. Meanwhile, the jobless problem is being neglected in the monthly income table. Jobless is in fact an extreme form of economic exclusion for the Nepalese in Hong Kong. Some interviewees even told me that they could not survive without job. Job, indeed, is their only way to be productive. Without any property in Hong Kong, they are more dependent on work.

*Main difficulty is...if we don't have work, you know, we don't have money, it is very difficult to stay in Hong Kong. We don't have pension, you know. We don't get, have other income also. We don't have house, we don't have land, so it is very difficult for us to stay in Hong Kong. (Amrit)*



Being unemployed is being totally excluded from the economic activities. It causes the chain effect for other modes of exclusions. In *Equality For All Races and Sexes* by FEONA, it writes, “since the Chek Lap Kok airport and bridge project had completed last year and thousands of Nepalese workers were laid off from their jobs. Now the unemployment rate of the Nepalese in Hong Kong is estimated about 22%. (p.8)” That is the estimated figure in early 2000. Last year, Yuen Long district board member Ken Chow had estimated that about 40 to 50 per cent Nepalese were unemployed<sup>45</sup>. In other words, unemployment drastically increased during the last two years. More and more Nepalese are being totally excluded from economic activities temporarily or permanently. However, when I trace the reasons of jobless among the Nepalese, it tells more about the dynamics between exclusions. I will discuss this in the next chapter.

Here I focus on the economically active participants. Many researches have argued that ethnic minorities have suffered from economic exclusion not only in terms of income, but also in terms of job nature and condition (Byrne 1999; Room 1995; Gore 1995; Kitano and Daniels 1995). They suffer from serious exploitation when participating economic activities. Hence, I am going to illustrate the economic exclusion against the Nepalese in subtle terms, which can be generalized in four terms: dirty, dangerous, demanding and devalued. Besides working as economic input, expenses as economic output also reflect respondents' economic situation. Thus, I also discuss their expenses, particularly housing expense, in the latter section. Now let's go through those subtle analyses.

#### 4.2.1 “nobody respect (us), even...the company also.” - Dirty

Many scholars talk about the most common job of immigrants taking up in the host society are dirty jobs, which the locals are reluctant to do. In other words, those are undesirable jobs. And dirty refers not only to the job nature but also to

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<sup>45</sup> SCMP, 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2001.

the working environment as well. In a sociological term, dirty job refers to low status work.

It is true that the Nepalese participate mostly in low status work. Most interviewees work in the construction and catering industries when categorized by their working field. Those are vapid and low status jobs. Large population of Nepalese working in construction sites can be evidenced by one of the only two Nepalese professional's associations is specifically for Nepalese construction workers<sup>46</sup>. And also, according to a survey conducted with 318 Nepalese randomly from the street by FEONA in 1999<sup>47</sup>, the major professions of respondents are construction workers (35.35%), domestic helpers (33.02%), workers in restaurant (12.58%), security guards (8.49%), business and others (6.6%). It is no difficult to understand that construction site is dirty, dusty and noisy place. The environment is a mixture of undesirable elements. Besides, most Nepalese construction workers are only labourers whose duty is a combination of cleaner and mover. It is obvious that the job is extremely harsh.

Meanwhile, I often heard that many Nepalese women worked in restaurant as kitchen helpers who in fact are in charge of cleaning and dishwashing. When I worked in a Japanese restaurant, there were two Nepalese women working as cleaning helpers. They took up the typical dirty job, including toilet cleaning.

In fact, taking up dirty job is obvious economic exclusion. The Nepalese are being excluded from other economic activities and end up with undesirable job. Even themselves note that they are not being respected because of their job, it is imaginable how difficult for them to execute the duty every day while they have to deal with their psychological uneasiness. As Lalit stated,

*Now Hong Kong, we are being very dominating, nobody respect, even, even (he paused for 1 second) the company also...very hard. (Lalit)*

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<sup>46</sup> It is Hong Kong Construction Workers Union. Further discussion about the Nepalese organization is in Chapter Six.

<sup>47</sup> *Final Report of Empowering Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. 1999. Hong Kong: Far East Overseas Nepalese Associations.



#### 4.2.2 “Very dangerous job, this one.” - Dangerous

Every work consists of certain risks, but there are some jobs more risky than others. Catering is the most dangerous works in Hong Kong<sup>48</sup>. But no respondent from this field has ever experienced accident. Perhaps the figure of risk is more related to the kitchen work rather than the food serving. Interviewees are mainly waiters and waitresses. Construction is another risky field. It ranks after the catering in the same report. Minor injuries, such as burn from sparks, can happen daily<sup>49</sup>. As construction site is such a dangerous place, it is astonishing to hear that “they don’t to apply for training before going to the construction site work” (Lekha). Three interviewees even had accident in their work and being hospitalized for various period<sup>50</sup>. Some interviewees witnessed death caused by accident in their working place. Diwash worked in building garbage tunnels, which were about 140 meters depth. There was a serious accident in his working site. He was definitely being frightened by it as he repeatedly reminded the dangerous of his job when he recalled the accident.

*Q: what do you think about your job?*

*Diwash: it is okay. Just very dangerous job, this one. In this tunnel, very risky. Risky, very risky, before two people already died...because so inside the tunnel, the gas, gas cutting, explode, gas cutting. Gas cutting, explode. Very dangerous. Very dangerous. And very risky. Very dangerous job, this one.*

Likewise, the risk is internalized in their jobs. Even workers follow every safety procedure, accidents can still be unavoidable and unpredictable. After all, safety procedure only minimizes the risk but cannot guarantee a dangerous-free working condition. What’s worse, some informants told me that their companies did not provide proper facilities to protect them from hurts. Instead of this, the

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<sup>48</sup> Summary of Occupational Safety and Health Statistics of 2000.

<sup>49</sup> This is specifically for respondents who are welders.

<sup>50</sup> Karna was struck by falling object on his head while he worked in construction site of new MTR station. He was hospitalized for a month. Kusum got toe injured while she worked in the new airport. She was hospitalized three times because of that. Dhan had head injury in construction site alos. He was hospitalized for about ten months and got 18 stitches on his forehead.



management often forced them to take the dangerous job. If workers take the job, they have to take the high risk as well. Otherwise, they have to find another work. Diwash knew that his job was dangerous. But he expressed that he did not have other choice besides construction. Keshab also worked in the same project. He also expressed his worries about the risk in his job. However, even though they realize the risk, they have no choice. "No choice" does not only tell their limit of choice in the labour market, but also sums up the situation that they face every day.

*In Hong Kong...we are the only workers. So we don't have any choice. Because who are the boss and who are our supervisors... they give us big pressure, you know... whatever they ask us to work, we must to work... don't do, they will fire us. So we don't have any choice, we must do. We can't disobey. Because some of the places are very dangerous we can see that, you know. But they tell us, they are telling us to go, to do that things. And then if we say that is very dangerous, the work, then you will lose (job) there. If you want to do that job, you can do. If you don't want, you go like this...There must be many, many, many company like this because I have experience about Hong Kong. I work in different company...our friends also they getting the kind of experience everyday...if we just keep quiet, then we do that job, right? But if we are not going to do that job, then they will tell us go home like this. No more job. That's why we must do...we have no choice. (Keshab)*

Because of the danger, anxiety and tension are easily arisen among construction workers. Since the construction job is internally risky, every procedure needs to carry out in extreme caution to minimize any possibility of accident. A little mistake can result in lost of life. That creates lot of pressure among workers.

At the same time, there is also another kind of danger which referring to the psychological feeling. That is danger of being fired. That is much obvious in those high-tension works such as catering. Food servers always under the great tension because catering is a service-oriented and customer-oriented business. They do not have much guarantee from avoiding dismiss. And that creates the feeling of insecurity. When I asked Surya to comment on his job, he stated that he was not so sure about its future.

*Surya: it is fine for me still. I don't know the future.*  
*Q: why are you so not sure?*



*Surya: well, you know, I think every person cannot do 100 per cent. Sometimes, we make some mistakes, that's the problem between employee and employer...some people when they got some mistakes or they got a problem. Even they did not have any notice, my boss will send them away...He just got fired within one hour. Even he hasn't got any notice. Just one hour. Yes, in Hong Kong or may be anywhere is like this between management and employee.*

Construction workers also have similar type of insecurity feeling towards employment. As most of them are paid in a daily basis, they can be fired at any minutes whenever they do mistake. What's more, since the working place is full of danger, consequently the safety regulation is very strict. People are easily being picked up because of careless. In other words, construction workers do not only deal with the physical dangerous in work, but also need to handle the feeling of job insecurity.

#### 4.2.3 “My daily life is just the machine.” - Demanding

Demanding nature of the work can be seen in two ways: physical and working hours. Firstly, many Nepalese are working in physical demanding work as they are working in harsh working condition, such as outdoor work. Helpers and construction workers are representative examples. They have to work outdoor under all types of weathers and climates. It is expected that their frequency of sickness can be rather high. During my fieldwork, several interviewees had suffered variety of sickness related to their working condition. They caught cold because of the rain and also got heat under the sun. However, we should not generalize the condition and apply it to all workers. According to informants, the situation is various from site to site. It is largely depending on the management of different companies. Some companies do provide umbrella for workers when they work under the sun and raincoat while it rains. That's why Keshab said “

*It depends on the foreman and the supervisor. If they are good, they provide everything for us without we ask them. Like the umbrella and other facilities. But if they are not good, we have no choice. We still need to work under the sun without umbrella...even the same*

*company, different worksite, different system, different situation. The work can be very different. (Keshab)*

Meanwhile, most of the unskilled work demands physically work greatly. For example, the construction labourers are in charge of miscellaneous works including cleaning up and moving heavy materials. Amrit, 56, construction labourer, he earned \$500 per day. However, his job was too much for his age. He regarded his life in Hong Kong as:

*It is nice and hard also, quite difficult. Unless we (He paused for 3 seconds.) work, we don't... can't stay you know, we have to work here. And it is very difficult because for my salary, I am old age. It is very difficult to get work. And if I get work, you know, it is difficult to, it is hard for me. But for the young, for other people, it is easy for them. But for me, it is quite hard these days, specially in the summer time. (Amrit)*

Demanding explicitly reflects from their working hour also. Indeed, long working hour is a problematic condition the Nepalese facing in their job. Most interviewees had to work from ten to twelve hours every day, especially for those who worked in construction field and restaurant. Being a welder (skilled labour), Keshab, like many other construction workers, had to work twelve hours every day.

*Mostly, We must spend for the job fourteen to fifteen hours everyday. Prepare, wake up, wash face, breakfast and then go transport time, you know and then in the company, we must spend twelve hours. May be fourteen to fifteen hours everyday. Busy, always. (Keshab)*

Yogan was a welder in construction site too. He worked ten hours per day and six days per week. His description of life in Hong Kong is typical for many other Nepalese who are being dominated by work.

*My daily life is just like the machine. In the morning, you get up at 5:30a.m., to get ready at 6:00a.m. and come back at 8:30p.m. Get off from the bus, take a rest, we sleep after dinner. Like a machine. Everyday is like that. We don't have any activities, because we don't have time. Very busy life. (Yogan)*

Not only the construction workers are suffering from long working hour, employees from catering business also share the same experience. Surya worked



in a theme restaurant. He also complained his busy working schedule. He could not even enjoy the provided meal when the business was good.

*Q: are you busy with your work?*

*Surya: yes, very busy. Very busy. It is very different restaurant from others. Because we have no dinnertime...I mean little bit rush for taking dinner. It is too busy, so many people because it is tourists' area...It is terrible. No time to stop. 12 hours running, running. Only half hour we can get meal and drinks...But we even have to realize because it is very busy, even half hour, we don't stop. We stop just 15 minutes and then finish the section. Because it is very busy.*

There are also some Nepalese working as security guards. The Nepalese has been benefited from the merit impression of the Gurkhas. It is easy for them to be a security guard or watchmen before the execution of professional permit requirement. Some interviewees were security guards before<sup>51</sup>. However, most of them just did it as temporary job. They all agreed that the job was easy but rather boring. Besides, it is a long working hour job. For security guard, they have to work for ten to twelve hours per shift while most of the time they have to stand in a position.

Even though people like Kopila working in office, the workload is quite heavy and her company often extends her working hour. Normally, her office hour was nine to six. She worked nine hours per day and five and a half day per week. But she often needed to work at over time and did not get extra pay for that.

*Kopila: because our company is really very, very big and then so many shipping company, so many things I need to do. Everywhere I have to go everyday. And then sometimes, it is three, four hours I go out, if I go out, I can't stay in office...As a messenger I need to help everybody. Even in the office, she asks me to find another sample, and then another asks me to find this document. And then boss asked me something, and then everyone is asking me one time, and then how, which one should I answer first.*

*Q: so how many hours do you work everyday?*

*Kopila: everyday is nine to six. But seven thirty, seven o'clock, nowadays there is a problem. They are little bit more, required us a bit more.*

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<sup>51</sup> For instance, Diwash, Mira, Sankar, Keshab and Ambar joined the security field before.

Sarmila also had long working hours in her previous job in restaurant. Overtime work seemed to be unavoidable during the weekends. Her experience illustrates the unstable working hours being another characteristic of their working condition.

*Sarmila: those days very busy. Because you know, restaurant almost full in the weekends, so I would be very busy in the restaurant. Weekends are very busy.*

*Q: so many days do you need to work that time?*

*Sarmila: six days a week, so I get one day off...But the working there is very hard, we need to do a lot of overtimes, especially the weekends, weekdays are not really necessary. But the weekend we have to do overtime, at least one hour. The business is very good.*

In fact, most construction workers also have quite unfixed working timetable as well. Their job is project based. In the case of reaching the deadline of project completion, workers usually require to work overtime. Considering overtime, workers may work as much as fourteen hours per day. There is not much surplus time left for their own activities. Sometimes, they also need to work on Sunday or other public holidays. Normally, as majority of them only enjoy one day off per week, busy and tight timetable is the frequent expression from respondents. Their job is extremely demanding.

*Very difficult to stay in Hong Kong, stay like this. Because you know, we must work for 12 hours, must wake up everyday, only one-day holiday. The only thing is we have very tight time, you know...So we can't do anything. For, at the holiday, for all the things. So we just go to work, come, eat, sleep, morning wake up then go work, like this. (Keshab)*

There are few holidays. Most construction workers only enjoy the labour holidays, which are only eleven days per year. More importantly, they do not get pay for those holidays because their payment is on a daily basis. On the other hand, some careers enjoy relative more holidays than others. People working in office like, Bindiya and Kopila, have two-week annual leaves. Being a school helper, SaLaxmi enjoys more holidays than others. She has two weeks annual leaves and leaves during the public holidays as well.



To sum up, as the majority of the Nepalese working in the construction, security and catering industries, their work is extremely demanding. While some works demand much on physical effort, others demand much on time input. Most workers have few holidays, long and unfixed working hours. Even some interviewees participate in other fields, they also experience the heavy workload and thus demanding working hours.

#### 4.2.4 “We are not getting our actual price.” - Devalued

Devalued can also be analyzed from two aspects: monetary reward and psychological effect. Referring monetary reward, it is easy to understand what devalued means here as it is based upon the statistical figure. Devalued is psychological effect concerning the low self-esteem due to feeling of unwanted generating from short-term employment.

After the Asian economic crisis, the whole economic environment has been changed totally in Hong Kong. This is more obvious in construction field. Most of the large-scale construction projects were completed in the last two years<sup>52</sup>. The new projects are few and also small in scale. The worker's salary has reflected this drastic change. Many interviewees repeatedly mentioned that they earned much money from the airport project. In fact, most of them who are construction workers have participated in airport project as well (Appendix 2). One interviewee told me that he earned more than 30,000 per month while he was working in the new airport project. However, workers' daily income has radically changed when the project finished.

*There was the airport project going on at that time, so the majority worked in the construction field. At that time, people who worked in the airport could earn 1000, 1200 per day. But when the project finished, construction workers' income decreased rapidly.*  
(Roshan)

Payment is varying in types of job and kinds of company. Normally skilled

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<sup>52</sup> Hong Kong Economy Annual Report 1994 – 2001.

workers earn relatively more than construction labourers even though they work in the same environment. While a skilled labourer, such as welder earn more than \$700 per day, the general labourers only get about \$400 per day. Even so, there is still a wide range of payment difference between companies. Amrit is a construction labourer. He told me his income.

*Amrit: that is depends up what kind of company we are working in, how they pay. In some companies, they pay high, for example, like getting, it is better than others, like \$550 per day. It is quite handsome salary. In some other places, they gave us four hundred for one day, \$450 for one day, like that...For the work also, because it is kind of skill work, and salary is not cheaper than other company because most Nepalese they are not getting \$500, you know, these days. Well, there is some skilled, like...if they are technique, like a carpenter, they get high salary, and as general labour, we don't get that much now at present.*

*Q: how much do you get for a general labour, do you know?*

*Amrit: ur...that depends up the company. Some they get for 400, 350.*

Referring the terms of wage among the Nepalese construction workers, it is striking to realize the numerous ways to describe their payment. And for each of the term, the exploitation inside is explicitly showed. First of all, workers are employed under the daily basis in construction work. In other words, they are casual workers.

*Before more than two years, I work monthly basis, later on the company change from daily basis to daily basis, no, monthly basis to daily basis. (Arun)*

Daily basis implies the reduction of all types of benefit provide by monthly basis, particularly paid holidays and sick leaves. As *Equality For All Races and Sexes* mentions, “in most cases the Nepalese are paid low wages, the contract is on the basis of daily wages and of course are confined by the bonus, insurance and other facilities...(p.8)” Workers only get pay for the days they attend their duty despite absence due to either personal excuses or weather condition. Hong Kong’s weather can be very unstable during the summer season. For the construction



workers, it is bad season because their work is being affected by the weather most of the time. At the meantime, their income also drops sharply during those months. In short, their income is unstable and insecure. Dhan worked in construction for more than five years, now he has opened his own restaurant and does not work in construction anymore. When he compared the work in construction with his restaurant business, he disliked the unstable income of construction work.

*If I working in the construction, I tell you something, ai...very important...one months is thirty day, four day is holiday, everybody, yes? ...I can tell you I can't work for this, 26 days. You know I have five children, me, seven, wife and me, seven. May be one day, one month is one time, may be my daughter go to hospital, may be, sick. One day absent, right? Another day is my son, only one day, absent. Some time me problem, some time my wife problem, I am not working seven days. So four days, Sundays, lost, and the seven days, I can work only 22 days, right? ... salary may be maximum is 15000. So I cannot solve my problem. (Dhan)*

In an extreme case, the payment is based upon hour. There are reports about some subcontractors used this “trick” to employ workers. When workers realized that they were being cheated, but it was too late already. Arun was employed by a telephone cabling company years before. He was told that he would get \$550 daily when he had interview in the company. However, it turned out that he only got \$50 per hour. He seek help from labour department but in vain.

*They paid, not on the daily basis, hourly basis. It was (He paused for 8 seconds.) almost 100 less than the recommended rate. Then after a month, I asked the wage supervisor, he said it was mistake, later we will adjust it. We will pay you the missing rate...in this way, the six month was passed...So I show it to the labour department. O...you already agree to do it, sign the contract, how can we listen to your, to your charge. So I leave there. (Arun)*

Construction in fact is a field with sophisticated division of labour. Projects are divided and shared by different subcontractors in the name of division of labour in order to save cost. Yet, it turns out to be further exploitation against workers. Everyone understands and realizes the risk of employed by subcontractors, however, that is their only way to get the job. It is impossible to approach the main



contractor since it is common that numbers of subcontractors are under the main contractor. It is just like Lekha said, *"they don't have any direct link with the company. They don't have any information about the construction company."*

Sankar also complained the difficulty of contacting main contractor.

*Now is very difficult to contact with the main contract. We tried main contract, subcontract, like this, like this, very division, subdivision. Main contract, sub main contract, subcontract, very little, the money is smaller, smaller. Very hard. And the, now is difficult, not like before. (Sankar)*

Despite of its scale, it is common that the construction project involves numerous of contractors. It is a highly hierarchical industry, with a few general contractors at the top manipulating a long string of sub-contractors, sub-subcontractors and sub-sub-subcontractors and so on. In this sub-contracting system, workers' payment reduces in the hand of subcontractor instead of main contractor. The work is passed on at increasingly unfavorable terms. Yogan told me that his subcontractor cut a quarter of his salary. He was dissatisfied about his present daily salary only \$600.

*\$600 is not good salary. Before I worked in Mei Fu, KCR and MTR interchange project, I was employed directly from the main company, there I got the actual price, \$800 per day...That was the level of Hong Kong standard. If you are in Hong Kong like a welder, not less than \$800, \$750 up to \$1200. And if Master, you can get \$2000 per day. That is the salary...But we are not getting our actual price. (Yogan)*

In fact, the exploitation by sub-contractors is not only in the monetary sense, but also in the workers' welfare like basic protection. Some informants told me that some sub-contractors did not even provide any equipment, such as safety shoes or masks for workers. If workers wish to work in subcontractor's company, they must buy the equipment themselves.

*I don't like the company I am working now. It is the sub-contractor of the main company. You know, they can fire us anytime without notice. They don't provide us any facilities. But since the main contractor provides the facilities for us, so we have them this time. But in some cases, the sub-contractor doesn't provide anything but*



*only helmet. So we have to bring our own boots and coat to work. Sub-contractor is like that. I don't like. (Keshab)*

Additionally, there can be numbers of sub-contractors under main contractor. Further division of contractors result in further reduction of the worker's salary, which indeed is deepening the exploitation against workers.

*We can't get the full salary from the subcontractor. You see, there can be many subcontractors under the main contractor. If there are five subcontractors under the main contractor, if every subcontractor gets \$50 per day. Then the worker get \$200 less per day. We can't get the full salary. (Bhabin)*

Extra benefits are also possible being cut by subcontractor. Yogan also stated that the resting hour was being cut when he worked for the sub-contractor company. Cutting resting hour implies the working hour is extended. That is a vivid exploitation.

*I work 12 hours. Seven to seven. We have lunch break but not tea break. I don't know the main company have given the tea break or not, but our company used to tell us, there is no tea break. But in our main company, when I worked in Mei Fu last year, there was lunch break and tea break...facility also given. This company doesn't give us tea break. (Yogan)*

Moreover, some subcontractors are unreliable. Since most of the construction workers are casual workers, the company can fire the workers at any time. This tells the insecurity of working for sub-contractors. What's worse, there are cases about subcontractors had run away before they paid workers<sup>53</sup>.

*You know, we find job either through agency or sub-contractors. Sometimes when we work for the contractor. We may not know him. He may run away when the day he needs to pay the salary. We can't find him...He just run away with the salary. And we can't ask the main contractor for salary because we are hired by the subcontractor. We can't get the money after we work there for a month. That's very bad. But that happened many times. Many Nepalese are facing this problem. (Bhabin)*

The Nepalese workers have faced not only the economic exploitation from sub-contractors, but also the obvious discrimination against them because of their

ethnicity. As they do not have much bargaining power due to lack of cultural capital, they face the economic disadvantage. Cheap salary is their sole advantage in the bargaining process. They do not get the same salary as Chinese workers even though they have the same qualifications or skills as Chinese workers<sup>54</sup>.

*We feel very discrimination in Hong Kong. You know, I am the welder...Chinese also welder... they get salary a day, ten or nine hundred. But if we go there, that company, they will decrease us, only six, six hundred, seven hundred like this. (Lalit)*

However, they still work for that company as Keshab said, “*they just give us fewer money than Chinese people because if we don’t have job, we have to go there, do the same job*”. Keshab had pointed out a very critical point among Nepalese workers. They only have two options: being employed with lower payment or being unemployed. Fear of unemployment is the weakness of the Nepalese workers. That is how they lose their bargaining weight in the contract arrangement. And that is how their salary being devalued by the company.

Likewise, construction work is in project basis. As a result, length of workers’ employment is varying in scale of the project. In fact, there is not many large-scale projects going on after the Rose Garden Project in Hong Kong. Although government has promoted numbers of large-scale projects, many of them are not yet implemented due to economic and political reasons. Surya was used to be carpenter but he was now a waiter as he noted the difficulties in finding jobs in construction field.

*It was very difficult to find job in construction site. Because there is no more project like before. I think most of the project is getting complete. Before it was new airport and new line, some work, some bridge. But now is just some housing construction. (Surya)*

Workers mostly work on the small-scale project, and thus they are often employed in short-term, which is only last for one or two years, or even shorter period. And it is not necessary for them to join the project at the very first

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<sup>53</sup> Mingpao 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2000



beginning. They may join it at the middle or nearly the end of project. In that case, their employment period can be even shorter. This also explains the phenomenon of underemployment in among the Nepalese construction workers. Yogan worked in the KCR new station project in Ma On Shan. He told me that he was not sure if his job was permanent or not.

*Q: is your job a long-term job? Permanent job?*

*Yogan: I cannot say, I have any more, I have no single job that can last for two years, more than one year, no. Only for six months, seven months, two months, eleven months.*

Yogan's experience is a typical example. In fact, most respondents have rich experiences in changing jobs (Appendix 2). Constantly job switching reflects their unstable and insecure employment and income. From job to job, there are unavoidable periods of unemployment. Those are periods of income vacuum also. Some of them also faced the problem of underemployment. Instead of working in full-time, some of them could only have the part-time job in order to earn a living. Lalit worked as a part-time construction worker for almost two years. He was really frustrated that time.

*Lalit: in construction site sometimes, part-time job only. And then sometimes, one month job, like this.*

*Q: they did not sign you for permanent job?*

*Lalit: no, no, just part-time, part-time job. I have to come there, to work, after finish work, and then leave.*

Although majority of the Nepalese work in construction and catering, minority of them works in other industries. Bindiya worked as administrative officer for about five years. She enjoyed her job since it was an easy and permanent work. Ambar was a night captain of shop assistants in Wellcome. The first thing he mentioned about his job was the permanence. He is a contrast example to casual workers in construction site. His comment on his job was:

*Wellcome, it is nice. Because it is permanent job, we can work for so long time. Right now I have already working there for seven years. More than seven years. (Ambar)*

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<sup>54</sup> This phenomena is reported in Ming Pao 28<sup>th</sup> July 2001 as well.

Most Nepalese construction workers are indeed casual workers who earn less than local workers. All the job conditions and environment together generate a sense of insecure towards work among Nepalese workers. Specifically in terms of payment, the daily basis system has allowed the employer to fire the workers without preceding notice. Arun, bamboo-scaffolding worker, expressed the feeling of insecure towards working in Hong Kong. He worked in the same company for about three years. His job is rarely stable while comparing with other construction workers. However, he still felt insecurity about his job. Needless to mention, other Nepalese whose work was only last for a few months to maximum one or two years, their anxiety must be stronger. That was what Arun told me.

*Job is not so, not so secure, not so, not so reliable, not a long last. Because if the company don't want, they can dismiss us anytime...I think my job can go more than one year now... if nothing happened in the meantime with the company, with my supervisor. If something happened wrong, then they can fire us. (Arun)*

In fact, one of informants did dismiss without preceding notice during my fieldwork. The unexpected note came in the morning after he arrived the site. He was a bit surprised although he had already noted that the project was near to the end. Since he was a casual worker, there was not much protection for him when he was dismissed like this. The company could dismiss him anytime and only had to pay for the notice day while company had to pay a month salary for permanent workers.

Insecure feeling towards job also appear on workers of other fields. Sarmila who used to work as a waitress, also expressed feeling of uncertainty towards job. Perhaps that was something to do with her previous experience. She was dismissed after five years working in the same restaurant because the restaurant was closed due to "unknown reasons".

*They did not give nothing. That's why all the staffs, we go to the labour department. It is still under the process. Because they just give us one-week notice. The notice was like we might be closing, they said, they were not sure. They said we might be closing within one month or two months. And since the business was not very bad. We did not expect that...one day we were all working on the duty, it*



*was around 12 o'clock, ...the people have paper, they come over and just close the door...So that time we just stay there, because the manager wanted us to stay there...And then last they said whatever you have in this restaurant, the belongings inside the locker take out because this company is not going to open anymore. So they just left us like that you know...we have been working there for a long time, for me is five years. But I think according to the law, they should pay me something. But they did not pay me anything. (Sarmila)*

Apart from construction workers, income is still the main concern in other fields. Being an administrative assistant, Bindiya's working environment and office hour was undoubtedly better than construction or catering workers. However, her income was comparative lower. She earned about \$8000 per month. According to 2001 Population Census, majority of clerks earn about \$10,000 to \$14,999<sup>55</sup>. She stated that her income was barely enough for herself only.

*I think is not good. Because you know, for the house rent is quite expensive in Hong Kong. And the house rent, and everything, we have to pay the telephone bill, and electricity, water, and for the expense of our own shopping. Something like that. For only one people is enough. (Bindiya)*

Bhabin also conveyed discontent about his salary. As a waiter, he earned \$10,000 per month. He argued the slow increase rate of his salary over the last five years. Even though he was unsatisfied with the salary, he was not dare to change his job.

*Because if I leave there, I can't job immediately. If I don't have job, it is very difficult to stay here. But I must stay here with my family, parent. That's why. (Bhabin)*

Facing the economic exclusion in Hong Kong, many respondents expressed their disappointment. Meanwhile, they also blamed that was the result of limit of choices. In fact, that is truly the result of economic exclusion.

*We have no choice, we have no choice. If we not do any job, we cannot eat. We cannot survive here. So we must be, we must take the job. (Lalit)*

Even those who were not working in construction also had the feeling of

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<sup>55</sup> 2001 Population Census, *Working population by occupation (Major group) and monthly income*



“hopeless to change”. For example, Bindiya did not dare to change job because she was not sure if she could found another office job. Lalit’s words are representative as showing the internalization of normalization of being excluded among the Nepalese. They consequently devalue their self-assessment.

*Q: so what do you think about your job? Have you thought about change your job?*

*Lalit: yes, it is nice. No choice. No choice. If I do not do this job, I will not find other job.*

*Q: If you have choice, what kind of job do you want to do?*

*Lalit: I can’t say, we cannot find another job.*

Nevertheless, it is a long process before the normalization of being excluded finally install successfully. Like Lalit, he had come from a long way before he found his present job. He only worked for temporary jobs previously. He tried hard to find stable job but he failed. After series of failures and adversities, he finally convicted to the fact of being excluded and gave up the hope of change or improvement. In fact, Lalit definitely is not the only one feeling like that. In most case, workers devalue themselves. And that is the extreme form of devaluating.

All in all, the insecurity of employment and different term of payment has devaluating effect on workers. While the monetary reward shrinks over the past years, the employment is not so stable or long lasting as well. Project basis creates much devalued feeling among Nepalese workers. The uneasy feeling of being temporary needed from either part-time or short-term job furthers the feeling of “unwanted” and being excluded. This kind of feeling is much stronger among unemployed Nepalese. Also, that is exactly what the Nepalese construction workers need to deal with because of the nature of project basis job. Definitely it could negatively affect workers’ emotional attachment towards their work, and thus ruins their will of inclusion to the host society. In short, I have pointed out several demerits of some major Nepalese’s occupation, i.e. construction, security and catering industries. Their job is characterized by dirty, dangerous, demanding and



devalued. I consider that the last one, i.e. devalued, evokes much exclusion. It does not only have negative effect on monetary rewards (visible exclusion) but also influence the psychological feeling towards the host society (invisible exclusion).

#### 4.2.5 *“Living environment, it is very hard to afford.”* - Accommodation Expenses

Additionally, the expense is equally important at sketching their economic situation. There are four main components of necessary expenses, including clothing, eating, transportation and accommodation. Among them, accommodation is the most important and obvious evidence of economic exclusion against the Nepalese in Hong Kong<sup>56</sup>. In recent years, the Nepalese, earning meager wages and living in apartments crammed with three to four families<sup>57</sup>, had frequently appeared in the media. Nearly all interviewees agreed that expensive rent was a critical problem while some of them even had ranked it as the most serious difficulty to live in Hong Kong.

Only two interviewees, Trilok and Roshan bought property in Hong Kong. Different from others, they had considerably high income and belong to wealth class (Appendix 1). And both of them had Chinese wives and planned to stay in Hong Kong for long term. On the contrary, most interviewees rent houses. None of them planned to purchase property in Hong Kong. Perhaps this is because few of them have a fixed plan to stay in Hong Kong in the future. What's more, the variation of the rent relates to the quality of the accommodation and location.

Firstly, accommodation is more expensive in developed and yet center areas than newly developed districts. For instance, Wan Chai and Yau Tsim Mong are two main districts heavily populated with the Nepalese, but the rent is comparatively higher than Yuen Long. I heard the highest rent among interviewees was nearly \$10,000 in Wan Chai area while residents from Yuen Long area paid no more than \$5000. Nevertheless, while choosing the residential place, rent is not always the

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<sup>56</sup> For details of interviewees' resident areas and rent, please refer to Appendix 3.

first priority for some Nepalese.

*Wan Chai I know is very expensive to live. The rent and something. But we must to live in Wan Chai because we need to work. it is easy to go anywhere from here. So we live here. (Surya)*

Secondly, expensive rent does not necessary equivalent to good living condition. This is more obvious in the center areas. Residing in Yau Tsim Mong district, Karna, Udeep and Suresh lived in similar flats. Suresh described his living environment as *"it is crowded, noisy, environment is very...the atmosphere is bad"*. He shared an apartment about 400 sq. feet with five friends. So his rent was the lowest among others living in the same area. That is why he said, *"because it is cheap, the noise is okay"*.

Karna paid \$2800 for a less than 150 square-feet room in a drab and old building. His building was a typical building around the area. There was no lift in his building. The staircase was narrow, broken, dirty and lack of luminous facilities. His room was divided from a flat originally with two bedrooms. His landlord changed the design of the house and rent them out to two families. Thus, there was no separate bedroom in Karna's house. His living room was merely enough to possess much furniture. But only a bunk bed, a dinning table and television shelf occupied his room. I sat on his bed when I interviewed him. Recently Karna was out of job. The family of three was depending on his wife's income solely. They spent more than one third of family income on rent. Although the room was not at good condition, that was what they could afford.

*I think rent house, too much rent, and then also my wife's salary is something about 7,500 and then I stay home and then baby, and then to get all the things, to buy, very difficult. (Karna, Yau Ma Teei)*

Diwash shared a nearly 300 square-feet flat with his cousin brother's family in Jordan. He paid almost double of Karna's rent. However, the facilities and outfit of his building were much better than Karna's building. There was a security guard

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<sup>57</sup> SCMP, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2000; 26<sup>th</sup> February 2001



at the main gate. There were two bedrooms in the flat. Diwash's room was about 100 square foot. It was enough for a small bunk bed and a small table. There was not much space left when we had interview in his room. He had to sit on his bed. My chair was only an arm far from him. Meanwhile, Sarmila used to live with his brother and some friends in a flat. They paid around \$7500 for that in Wan Chai. But the room was poorly designed.

*The one we used to stay before like is like no window, may be one or two rooms have windows...that was very congested, not very comfortable. That was very cheap, not very cheap, around \$7500 something. It was acceptable. (Sarmila, Wan Chai)*

Thirdly, the rent is much cheaper in Yuen Long side with relatively poorer living condition and lack of community service, such as public transportation. In fact, Farwell (1985) has noted that the Nepalese communities eventually sprang up around the regimental homes in India. He explains that some Gurkhas retired and chose to stay near their old regiments instead of returning to Nepal. Same phenomena can be found in Hong Kong as well. Gilbert (1997) reports that "*many Nepalese were still living in the area (of the former military camp Shek Kong)*". As a matter of fact, Kam Tin area is described as the spiritual home<sup>58</sup> of the Gurkhas and contains large Nepalese population. One of Kam Tin villages is known as "Nepalese village"<sup>59</sup>, i.e. Tai Hong Wai. Six interviewees lived in Kam Tin while five of them lived in Tai Hong Wai. People enjoyed the cheap rent there. Machhindra is one of them. In fact, he wanted to live in Wai Chai area for the feeling of living in "*a developed place*"<sup>60</sup>. But he could not afford the expensive rent outside. He chose in Kam Tin because of low rent. Generally, it cost about \$2000 for the rent around the area.

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<sup>58</sup> This nice description is used in SCMP, 8 March 1998.

<sup>59</sup> There is various saying about "Nepalese village." The local media use this term to describe Tai Hong Wai. However, some interviewees told me that should be specifically describe the area near the edge of Tai Hong Wai. For the purpose of clarification, I use "Nepalese village" to describe Tai Hong Wai and "Gurkha village" to the small area near Tai Hong Wai.

<sup>60</sup> Machhindra described that living in the Gurkha village was just similar with living in Nepal while Wan Chai and Central areas were more like living in Hong Kong, a developed place.

Lalit lived in 200 square-feet flat of a three-floor building for more than five years in Tai Hong Wai<sup>61</sup>, Kam Tin. His house was about ten minutes walk from the main road of the village. He commented his living place “quiet and nice” environment. And his description of accommodation in Wan Chai area was, in fact, reflecting the living environment of many Nepalese in Hong Kong.

*The Wan Chai side, the Yau Ma Teei side, we can't find the room. If we can find the room, it is very really high rent. If we want a cheaper one, it will be very old and need to walk very high. So I don't like...If we stay there, we are working very hard in the construction site. And then after the work, we are very tired, then we still need to walk. I don't like that...it is far to working place, but not need to walk, and then no crowded. So we like it. We know it is far to find the work. (Lalit, Kam Tin)*

Yogan and Amrit paid \$1800 for their rent, which was rather cheap comparing to others. However, their living condition was also poorer than others. They lived in a neighbourhood where Amrit described as a “slum area”. Their apartments were badly designed and roughly built by tin materials. More than ten families shared one public toilet. Their house were in rectangle shape includes three main parts, 1) kitchen and bathroom, 2) living room and 3) bedroom. The total area was about 250 square-feet only. There was no window inside the house except a tiny window in the kitchen. Amrit lived with his two sons and wife while Yogan lived there with his wife and a relative only. Basic facilities such as electricity, water and telephone line were provided.

Another heavily populated area of the Nepalese is the famous Gurkha village. According to Lalit, it was a pig farm originally. The owner abandoned the pig farm. He re-built it into some small huts in the area and offered very low rent. Since the rent was so cheap, it attracted many Nepalese to settle there. However, the living condition of the place was really unpleasant. I had been there twice. The

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<sup>61</sup>About 2,000 to 5000 Nepalese live in 13 Kam Tin villages. This estimated population is concluded from various report since there is no official report about the actual figure. There are about 700 Nepalese inhabitants living in Tai Hong Wai. The Nepalese makes up approximately 80 per cent of Tai Hong Wai's residents.



unpleasant environment was striking. It was a typical slum area indeed. The fieldnote of my first visit was:

*When we went near the end of the village, we were in so-call Gurkha village area. The area was surrounded by low wall. There were about 20 tin huts inside the area. The huts were in poor shape. They were merely 2 meters height and roughly built by stones and tin-plates. Some stones were stuck out. Some part of tin-plates were rust. Painting was pilling off. There was a tiny window in each hut. The window was glued with colorful paper to cover the broken glasses. Some houses' windows were opened but closed by curtains in very dark colors. Clothes were hanging outside, in front of each house. Some windows were opened. Their house was very small with a dim light on. It was about 100 square-feet. The place was packed with furniture and other stuffs. (Fieldnotes in 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2001)*

Mira lived there. I requested if I could go into her apartment after interview. She was a little bit hesitated and said the house was hot. But she finally let me in. Her house was about 200 square-feet. It had similar designed as Amrit's house. It was a rectangle shape built by mainly tin plates. It equally divided into three sections and each was about 60 square-feet. First was the living room. It was barely big enough for a television and video set and a sofa. The next room was living room. A two-person bed occupied the area. Then the final section was kitchen and bathroom. In the bathroom, there was a mousetrap containing a sausage in front of the toilet. Much space was occupied by toilet. The rest space of the bathroom was barely enough for a person to stand. There was no window in the house. It was extremely hot and the air was bad. Mira paid \$1600 for the rent. She commented her house as "very cheap, but very hot". She repeated twice that her living environment was not comfortable during the one and a half hour interview.

*Air-condition have but not working. Because the sun. So not good. And also ok...my monthly pay is only 5500. My husband sometimes, one month 12000, sometimes, 8000 to 9000 when it raining, they stop. When typhoon, they don't work. Because they get the daily salary. One day 400. Ok. I live in here ok. (Mira)*

Although Mira liked to move in Yuen Long where she called city, they "cannot live, cannot live, very expensive". Camala and her family lived in Yuen Long

center. Their rent was more than double comparing with Mira's family. Mira's statement shows strong correlation between income and living expense. Even though she was unsatisfied with the present living environment, she had to be compromised because she did not have high income when her husband worked in the construction and did not have stable income.

Besides the unfavorable living condition, transportation is another problem in Kam Tin area. Indeed, Their residence is quite remote and excluded from the center area. The main transportation is mini-bus and taxi, which are more expensive than bus. The bus company does provide seven bus-lines running around Kam Tin and Pat Hang areas. Mostly the transportation service only connects Kam Tin to Yuen Long center. People have to change bus in Yuen Long Center if they want to go to other places. In Tai Hong Wai, the main Nepalese village, there is only one bus going outside Yuen Long. Also, low frequency of the bus service is often heard.

*Transportation, we have only one bus to Tsuen Wan, 251M, that is the main route to Tsuen Wan. Sometimes is difficult. It is always late and sometimes comes like twins. (Yogan)*

Additionally, rent is only part of the expenses of accommodation. Bhabin paid \$7000 for a 400 square-feet flat in Wan Chai. He leased one room to other Nepalese ladies. He and his father had their private room separately. There was nearly one thousand extra expense for other items.

*Water bill and electricity bill is separate. And the water bill and electricity bill is quite high here because everybody is using the air-conditioner. Every time they use it when they at home. Normally the Nepalese people, they like to stay at home...That's why normally they use the electricity to cook the food. That's why a little bit high for the electricity and water bill. (Bhabin)*

Lalit paid \$2500 for the rent. Then he needed pay around \$500 to \$700 dollars more for other expenses including electricity, government tax and the water charge, telephone payment also. Thus, altogether he paid \$3000 to \$3200 in housing, which is nearly a fifth of his monthly income. Pawan described the reality of the



## Nepalese construction workers' hardship.

*One day is working. One month is working on construction. It closes. Nobody can say what can for long lasting. What to do? People have to survive, they have to do the job. Even the job last for one week, they have to do...Because there is expensive things. Lot things are expensive. We take our rent, for a room also takes, minimum 3000, 5000. If you are 3, 4 family, it must take 5000. And other thing, people's wage, just like I told you 400 to 500. Not more than that. In one month, people work only 26 days...They cannot earn lot of money. Just calculate like that, 26 days one month is minimum 10,000 like that. But 10,000 just there. 5000 for rent, 1000 for electricity and water. 3000 they take for themselves, so he (He paused for 2 seconds.) cannot spend. He cannot do nothing... He cannot collect. He cannot spend. So how can he survive? How can he survive? So we have to struggle, struggle. (Pawan)*

To sum up, the Nepalese community has suffered the severe economic exclusion particularly in terms of employment and housing expenses. In sense of monetary reward, most Nepalese who participate in the construction industry, enjoy comparatively high income than clerical or catering employees. However, despite the high unemployment rate, the economic exclusion against the Nepalese community in Hong Kong can be illustrated by 4D works: dirty, dangerous, demanding and devalued. They have showed the Nepalese vulnerability to the economic situation in Hong Kong and their situation is getting worse during the economic restructure in recent years. Obviously, they become the scapegoats during the economical crisis. Moreover, referring to the expenses, housing rent is the main difficulty. As The Sun Daily reported, "more than half of the family income is spent at rent, the Nepalese can maintain their basic life in Hong Kong. But they cannot enjoy too much entertainment or social activities."<sup>62</sup> As Amrit said, "we can earn, we can work, we are earning now, but it is difficult to save, you know. Because every expensive here, you know." Being frustrated by the multiple economic exclusions, many interviewees consequently internalize the normalization of being excluded. Their anxiety and discontent about the situation have driven

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<sup>62</sup> Sun Daily, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2001.

them to ask for more protection from the political aspect. That will be discussed in Chapter Six.

### 4.3 Civil Exclusion: Second-class Citizens and Distant Friends

Civil exclusion is more concerned with their interaction with the locals in everyday life experience. This section examines civil exclusion through dimensions of social relation between the Nepalese and locals. First of all, one of the critical aspects concerns here is discrimination. Discrimination indeed is a complex psychological, cultural and social phenomenon. The examples given by interviewees in this section shows the discrimination against the Nepalese existing in every facet of working and social life. Then, I will discuss the relationship with neighbours, colleagues and other locals they have crossed by. As a matter of fact, few of them have close relationship with Chinese. Their relationship is like Udeep's description "*I have some friends, not so deep, only hi, hello*" or Dipendra's account "*many just few talking friends, not very close friends*". Furthermore, their impression on locals, which reflects locals' attitude towards them since impression is basically built up from daily interaction experience. Those data supply us a vivid picture about the civil exclusion against the Nepalese from the civil relationship aspect.

#### 4.3.1 "*Nepalese has been harassed in their social lives...*" - Discrimination

Discrimination is the most excessive form of civil exclusion. Reports of discrimination against ethnic minorities repeatedly appear in the media<sup>63</sup>. The recent active discussion of legislation prohibiting racial discrimination is also a good indicator of its existence in Hong Kong. Besides, FEONA's publication, *Equality For All Races and Sexes* also writes,

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<sup>63</sup> Among those reports, SCMP 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2000 has a very nice report on an anti-racism group named "HARD". It gives substantial accounts on the frustration and feeling of helpless of the group. Moreover, it tells the disgusting reality of discrimination in Hong Kong. Further references can be found in Mingpao 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2001; 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2001; Sun Pao 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2001.



The Nepalese has been harassed in their social lives in Hong Kong. They are badly treated when reporting some cases in police station. Normally several cases of unreasonable body search will find in the street everyday. It can easily observed the price difference for Chinese speaking people and others in the market. Even several clubs and pubs prohibited the entrance or membership of other nationalities (p.9).

Undoubtedly, discrimination exists in Hong Kong. However, the majority of interviewees kept silent about this topic as they would refer it as personal experience rather than a problem of the whole community. For instance, Chairlady of Nepalese Women Association, Camala Rai agreed that there was discrimination against the Nepalese, especially the Nepalese women. However, she regarded it as the predicament of Nepalese culture rather than the problem in Hong Kong. She even urged me to ignore whoever complained the matter.

*There is no discrimination in Hong Kong. One may have discrimination experience. That is not the opinion of the whole community. You should not listen to that. That is only an individual experience. You should not write anything about that in your thesis. In Hong Kong, we assimilate with the grassroots people, not the high one but the grassroots people. They accept us like we accept them. They are friendly and sincere like us. We assimilate with them. We are never being dominated or discriminated by anyone. (Camala)*

Undeniable, it is possible that some people may not experience discrimination in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, discrimination should not be treated as individual matter. Several interviewees gave me concrete examples of being discriminated. As there are similarities between their cases, discrimination against the Nepalese is so obvious that should not be treated as individual experience solely. After all, to a large extent, they share the same experience as they are from the same community. Meanwhile, for those did not mention discrimination, I suspect that it is due to their detachment from the host society since majority of them maintain distance from the locals. They seldom had much contact with the locals. I will illustrate this more in the succeeding sections about their relationship with the locals. Now lets take a close look of discrimination first.

## I. Discrimination in Work

NGOs and the media widely note discrimination occurring in work regard nationality, race or ethnicity while job-hunting. Most interviewees did not mention this kind of difficulty in their job hunt. Instead, many respondents stated discrimination against them in economic aspect, which I mentioned in previous section. Nevertheless, Bhabin did experience frustration and unfair treatment because of his nationality while he searched for job. That was apparently racial discrimination.

*Some of the time, you find the job, what's the nationality, and which language you use, you speak. Then if you are not Cantonese, you can't get the job, some of the time. I get my experience from find out, even the restaurant job. O, you can't get the job, sorry. Like that. I can't say anything. (Bhabin)*

Discrimination in work shows more in the management and colleagues' behavior as well. Being blame for mistake is Lalit's recent experience. He was not the one should be responsible for the mistake. However, he was being blamed. He was angry with the management but there was nothing he could do about it.

*He behave very nice to others Chinese guy. And then he behave me very bad. Last time...my safety supervisor is Chinese, we are working workshop together...and then that time, the labour department come to check the working area...there was something wrong. Then safety supervisor, everyone was there, the Chinese welder is senior than me. The responsible of hard ware work was Chinese. But he didn't ask the Chinese, I was very far, he called me like this, Lalit, Lalit comes here (He moved his hand.) Come here!... then I came nearly to the safety person. And then he looked at that, you do it? Why? Why don't you put like this? Then I was surprised. The senior welder was near. But he didn't ask him but he asked me. He wants to make me, I was wrong, I was not safety. Then I angry with him. Why should you ask me? You ask the senior welder. Responsible the senior welder, senior welder can tell us to make, to make nice...he didn't tell anything, and then he go back. He did not ask the senior welder...He cannot say the Chinese guy. Then he dominated me. I was far and Nepalese also. It is discrimination. (Lalit)*



## II. Discrimination in Social Life

Many interviewees experience discrimination in their social life. Residing with the locals, the Nepalese have opportunities to interact with the locals. Discrimination occurs in those subtle interactions and mirrors the poor attitude to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. The Nepalese suffer various degree of discrimination in social life as minor as unhelpful manner, as serious as verbal insulation. When interviewees talked about their experience of discrimination, they were angry but helpless.

### Case 1

*If I want to take the taxi and there is another Chinese guy, they would not accept me, they would accept the Chinese guy. Then, in locations, you know, so many times, I feel like that. They ask where, 邊度 (where), where do you want to go, like that, not very polite. I know the Chinese language very polite...but they cannot use, they did not use us. Where do you want to go? Then if I cannot say the place name in Chinese, they would not like this. Then you know, if Chinese guy bring the taxi from Yuen Long to here, the taxi will bring nearly the house, but they will leave me in the main road. Then I, if I ask to go inside, o, it is difficult to go inside. 唔得啊你! (No way.) So many places I feel discrimination like that. Mostly, mostly, journey, we are leaving some site, other site are empty...on the bus, when we go there...if we talk some Nepalese, and then they know we are Nepalese, then they will leave that seat and go. That is the discrimination. That is rude. (Lalit)*

### Case 2

*Just I go to buy some shirt, some food, I go, I go some shop and then I tell to 幾多錢啊? How much like this, he say like this, twenty dollars. I ask some discount. And then he is angry...he tells me bad word. Like this. He tells me bad words, like this 癡線. (Crazy) Not educated. (Karna)*

### Case 3

*Sometimes I feel especially when you rent, I go to rent a flat, they said that I don't want to rent you. But the only happen one time. The landlord friend had very bad feeling about the Nepalese people... I said why, you don't rent it? What problem you have? O, my friend rent a house, they said for two people, it turned out ten people stay there. May be, may be the people, the old people, you know, living in the New Territories, they don't know the new Nepalese people, so may be they scared to rent for someone, you see. May be they think not comfortable for them, may be they cannot communicate with those people. That may be the reason. (Trilok)*

#### Case 4

*Arun: I think in the hospital, here sometimes doctor not treat you well, treat we very well. To, I think, I think more than here are local patients, but some of the doctor treat us like a second citizen... just this year, my toe was broken, fractured here. (He pointed at his right toe.) I went to hospital, just band it, give the painkiller and send me back home...but later they didn't, after, later I go to the public hospital. I could not move my finger well. My doctor used to give me two days sick leave. One of the nurse, either man nurse or woman nurse, used to say the boy he just come to ask for the sick leave, he is not really sick. But he wants the sick leave more.*

*Q: did he speak in Cantonese?*

*Arun: yes.*

*Q: and you understand?*

*Arun: yes. And whatever, I show the paper. What do you want? (He raised his voice.) And I show the paper, which I got from the pervious doctor. He wrote my record. What do you want? I want to see the doctor. You want sick leave? Like this...before all of us are same I think because some of Chinese are very good. We cannot find in our own neighbours, in our country. Some of them don't know how to respect people, don't know the problem of other people, how to treat other people, not treat us like a man. (He raised his voice.)*

Arun even mentioned that he felt like being treated as a second-class citizen when he checked up in the hospital. "Not treat us like a man" is a serious accusation against locals' behaviour. This, in fact, shows much discontent about experiences of interaction with the locals. Rudeness, impolite, unhelpful and unfriendly attitudes are the interviewees impression on Hong Kong people. As a matter of that, these impressions are probably arisen after being discriminated. Otherwise, the Nepalese should not have such negative comments on the locals.

*Suppose if you went to somewhere, and you lose the place, you don't know, you know the address, and you have to go for that place, and you asked them, they just 唔知, 唔知啊! (don't know, don't know) they said just we don't know, we don't know. They are not helpful for some of them. Suppose when you go to the street, suppose some of the time you got accident, suppose you fall down on the road, nobody care for them...they not provide for any help. (Bhabin)*

Even so, someone like Trilok is still positive about the discrimination problem. He did not deny the existence of discrimination. But he argued that the problem



could occur anywhere, even in Nepal. Hence, it was an issue of human nature.

*Q: do you feel any discrimination in Hong Kong?*

*Trilok: hm...this question is hard to answer, you know? Sometimes, of course, you see, thing is discrimination is done everywhere, not only Hong Kong. If a Chinese person goes to Nepal, they also do. Yes. Some kind of discrimination is there. Yes. The local community, if one Chinese person stay in that village, and the whole local community is there, there is some kind of discrimination. So it is not only here.*

Here I am not trying to exaggerate the degree of discrimination in Hong Kong. Instead, I show the reality of existing discrimination. Also, it is really irritating to hear that Hong Kong is a discrimination free place<sup>64</sup>. The experiences of discrimination against the Nepalese further falsify this saying.

#### 4.3.2 “We never talk to each other...” - Relationship with Neighbours

Despite some villages in Kam Tin, many Nepalese reside in areas where most of their neighbours are Chinese. In most cases, they are the only Nepalese family living in the neighbourhood. However, they may not have much contact with any of their neighbours.

*In Wan Chai, in the area, but most are Chinese, you know. But Nepalese may be in one flat. But we never talk to each other in other flat. That's is the problem. So we don't have any relation with the Chinese. (Keshab)*

Most interviewees expressed unfamiliarity with their neighbours. They seldom have contact with their neighbours. The loosen relationship is plainly showed in their frequency of contact.

*We go to work, come back from work, open the door and lock. Close the door, nobody concern. (Suresh)*

Suresh's experience is coincided with many others. Machhindra had experiences of living in different place. His relationship with neighbours did not show much difference throughout the times he moved. Now he lives on the second

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<sup>64</sup> Hong Kong government has been accused by NGOs because of its ignorance of discrimination existing in Hong Kong. Details refer to SCMP, 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2000.

floor of a two-floor type building. He often met his neighbour who lived downstairs when he came or left home. They had no more contact besides that. Nevertheless, they had friendly relationship with each other.

*Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, I living here, this flat, you know this flat, another flat, no contact, no contact, I living here, I open the door, and coming inside, close the door. No contact. No contact. Here I will go down, I see, and only smile, only smile. (Machhindra)*

In fact, a good relationship with neighbour provides a strong assisting source. However, many Nepalese are lack of this kind of support in Hong Kong. Living in the same flat for nearly one and half year, Bhabin still did not know the family living next to him.

*Q: do you know your neighbour, the people living next to you?*

*Bhabin: next to us? No, no, I don't know...because sometimes, I tried to keep in touch, I know they are Chinese. But never we don't have any communication...Suppose in Nepal, in the countryside, suppose if you in Wan Chai, suppose myself I stay in Central, everybody know each other even they don't have any relation. Suppose like that parents, if you don't know, but know the people is from here...Just next to me, but I don't know who's them. And suppose sometimes we got the trouble...and if the communication is good, we can ask them, can we borrow something? Never, never, I can't talk to them.*

Arun and Ambar described their relationship with their neighbour "just hello". Arun got help from his neighbour when he first moved in the house. He had good impression on them. Nevertheless, they seldom contact with each other. In other words, they are distant from each other. Many interviewees occasionally had simple conversations when they met their neighbour in the corridor. However, their relationship is superficial. The relationship seldom becomes closer.

*Q: so do you know anyone living in the building?*

*Diwash: until now, no. I just know the Chinese next door. Sometimes, we wait and see in the lift, we talk. He speaks English. He is police, Hong Kong police.*

*Q: really?*

*Diwash: yes, he speak good English.*

*Q: does he talk to you sometimes?*

*Diwash: yes, sometimes, he talk when we meet in the corridor. Sometimes only.*



While many of them did not have contact or remained superficial relationship with neighbour, SaLaxmi had unhappy experience with her neighbour. Although she could not give an account of neighbour's behavior, she sensed the tension between them because of her ethnicity.

*Q: how about your neighbour? Do you know your neighbour?*  
*SaLaxmi: yes, neighbour. But I think, I think he not like Nepali, I think...my baby, sometimes he looking for, he told me 搞錯啊! 麻煩啊! (Damn it! Troublesome.) One man, other people house. My small baby, he don't know anything, but he, but he sometime looking for inside, see the baby and said 搞錯啊! 麻煩啊! (Damn it! Troublesome.)... he told me. So sorry, sorry! I tell and bring my baby inside. I think he don't know Nepalese.*

Besides neighbour, landlord is another group of people who have high possibility of having frequent contacts with the Nepalese. Their relationship with their landlord can also be an indicator of their social relationship with the locals. Talking about landlords, most respondents did not keep close touch with their landlords. As Yogan described,

*Only we have relationship like the landlord and the renter. If we pay in the correct time, he just you came very good. If we don't pay in correct time, he came at the night and asked why don't you pay, you don't pay at the right the time. (Yogan)*

Furthermore, it was common that interviewees compared their life in the host society (Hong Kong) with the situation of their homeland (Nepal). The Nepalese tended to have rather intimate relationship with their neighbours in Nepal. Yogan recalled his relationship with his neighbours in Nepal.

*When we were in Nepal... if I have some drinks, hello, come here, take drinks here, come here, let take your dinner here, take some food here, like that. (Yogan)*

Indeed, it is very different relationship here. Suresh stressed that *"this is not the relation we have in Nepal"*. While the Nepalese are generally friendly and close to each other in Nepal's neighbourhood, but local neighbours seem "quiet" towards their Nepalese neighbours in Hong Kong. Shiva gave more details about

the differences.

*Chinese people are, doesn't bother anything...they doesn't help, they doesn't bother also. Not like our Nepalese, different system. If something problem comes next door, we try to help and we ask them. But in Hong Kong, if you ask them, they feel bad. It is not your business, something like that. So that is the something. They doesn't bother for anything. (Shiva)*

Interviewees always use Nepal's neighbourhood relation as a reference example to compare with the relation they have with their Hong Kong neighbours. That not only implies their homesick, but also stresses their distance with their Hong Kong neighbour.

#### 4.3.3 “We have relationship only when working.” - Relationship with Local Colleagues

Working place are where the Nepalese have chance to meet, get to know, make friends with the locals. In fact, for the majority of the Nepalese, it is the only venue where they interact with the locals. However, as I mentioned above, many Nepalese are working in the construction site as casual workers. Their work is characterized by project basis. It often finishes within a rather short period. It is hard for them to build up a long-term and stable relationship with colleagues under that circumstance. After all, it takes time to get to know each other. Often, they do not meet each other again after the company dismisses them when the project finishes. What's more, some of them had unpleasant experience while cooperating with the locals.

*Amrit: in the construction site...I think because of the work, I think, hard work, they are generally I find fury...because of the very hard work. Generally I find them very angry. Whether understanding anything, they just very angry. It is very difficult for people to understand why they get angry.*

*Q: how do you know they are angry?*

*Amrit: shout in the loud voice, you know. And say 快D, 快D (quickly, quickly) all this thing. And generally I heard the bad words, you know, speaking like that.*

Suresh also complained people shouting in work site. Colleagues' attitude



towards him was rude because of the language problems. Yogan stated that he only communicated with his colleagues in commanding words. Rather than a friendly relationship, his experience apparently shows the hierarchical relationship among workers.

*With Chinese people we can talk only commanding words, like you come here, you do this first, you do this very fast. Commanding words like this we communicate with Chinese. (Yogan)*

For those who maintain fair relationship with the locals, the relationship seldom extends to private sphere. It solely remains in the working place. In other words, their relationship with colleagues are working relationship instead of further close relationship. There is clear a boundary between work and personal interaction.

*Q: so do you do anything with them (colleagues) after work?*

*Amrit: generally, we don't have any meeting after work, in the work time only.*

Exclusion and inclusion indeed are degrees of acceptance. Lalit observed that locals would change their attitude towards him under certain conditions. His local colleagues included him when they did not have other Chinese friends. But the Nepalese were being excluded from local colleagues' social alliances when there were some more Chinese.

*Mostly who are working in the construction site, mostly proud. Then if they don't have any friend of Chinese, they accept us. If they have some Chinese friend, they will not talk to us. (Lalit)*

Compared with construction workers, people have a rather fine relation with their colleagues when their jobs are stable. For instance, Bhabin had a relative good relation with his Chinese colleagues after working together for five years in the same clubhouse. Sometimes, he taught them Nepali as they taught him Cantonese as well. He also stated his management fond of him because of his hard work. However, their fine relation only exists in the working place during the working hours. Bindiya and Sarmila were few who extend their relation with

colleagues outside the workplace. They went out with their colleagues sometimes. But they also commented that their relation with colleagues was not deep at all.

#### 4.3.4 “*They are not educated.*” - Impression of Locals

Impression of locals is the overall conclusion of the relationship between the Nepalese and Chinese locals. Most interviewees did not have close relation with the locals except few of them<sup>65</sup>. On the one hand, some of them only had a general idea about the Chinese such as “*they are ok*” (Suresh) because they had “*no special relationship with locals*” (Suresh). On the other hand, some did have negative impression of local Chinese. To some extent, the Nepalese are distant from locals because of negative experience from interaction. Sankar, for instance, commented that Chinese people were very rigid.

*In my opinion, they are very rigid. If you don't know me, you cannot do, you cannot talk to me. If I asked to you, excuse me like this, like this, he doesn't want to say. (Sankar)*

Yogan also agreed that locals did not show much concern towards others. According to him, “*for Chinese people, only they concern themselves, they don't concern other people, toward us.*” Upendra also pointed out that some locals did not care about them especially referring to his shopping experience. His experience implicitly shows the locals may not welcome outsider i.e. ethnic minorities as much as people expected.

*Some of the real local Chinese people, they still don't know the world... sometimes, they quite rude, you know? And I feel like, a bit bad about that. But still I have to stay here. I can't do anything for that, right? If I have that kind of situation sometimes...Like going shopping also, sometimes feel like they don't really care, they don't give any care...some of the places, they are not interested or something like that. But I just feel that is their manner. So I just forget it. They don't want to be friendly, so no problem. May be I find other shop...in the restaurant also...sometimes they just don't care. (Upendra)*

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<sup>65</sup> Trilok even has a Chinese business partner. Roshan has some Chinese clients. Dhan describes the close relationship with one of his frequent customers as a family member.



To sum up, civil exclusion against the Nepalese can be easily found. Being an ethnic minority, they are unavoidable to have contact with the locals although the frequency is different among individuals. Almost all interviewees did not have any close relationship with the locals from neither work nor neighbourhood. On the contrary, many of them experienced discrimination from daily life experience in various degree. That is the most excessive and obvious form of civil exclusion. The civil exclusion is an obstacle to their integration into the host society and results in further exclusion.

#### **4.4 Political Exclusion: Invisible Citizens**

Political exclusion regards the barrier of participation in political and policy processes (Rogders 1995; Gore 1995; Geddes and Benington 200; Chan and Yu 2001). The state is often an active social actor excluding outsiders from political rights. As found in my studies, there are two types of political exclusion against the Nepalese. First is policy ignorance and second are uninformed rights. I divide the following discussion into two parts and illustrate both exclusions respectively. I summarize political exclusion against the Nepalese basically because government has treated them as invisible citizens.

##### **4.4.1 Policy Ignorance**

Hong Kong government has neglected the existence of some ethnic minorities in many aspects. The Nepalese is one of the neglected communities. Chapter Three mentioned that the population of the Nepalese had never been put in the Population Census until this year. This carries a very important political implication. As everyone knows, almost all policy decisions and planning are based upon the results of Census. Being neglected in the Census also implies the ignorance in the future planning. Ekraj expressed his discontent about this type of ignorance.

*They don't have any different to other community people. They*

*think that Hong Kong is all to Chinese people...they don't think Indians are there, Pakistanis are there, Nepalese are there. Many small nationalities are there...people are migrant's people to Hong Kong. They are going to stay here...and their connection to Hong Kong is very important I think. And the Hong Kong government has to see this kind of thing. But they don't do any different to our culture. They don't do any different to our being. Nothing else. As a whole, they think there are all Chinese. (Ekraj)*

Such ignorance in policy planning has serious consequences on ethnic minorities' social integration in many ways. Education policy is one of the examples. Regardless of adaptation problem may arise among the new immigrants, ethnic minority children even have great difficulties in school admission at the very beginning. Although they are also under the protection of compulsive free 9-year schooling until age 15, they have many difficulties in earning this privilege due to the policy hole. As Chapter Three discussed, most Nepalese did not speak dialect of Hong Kong, i.e. Cantonese. Local schools seldom accept non-Cantonese students due to certain constraints, such as difficult in classroom management. Meanwhile, there is practical difficulty for those students to catch up the class in local school. Therefore, the Nepalese students have to look for English school even though English is not their first language. They might also be poor at English. But their English should be comparatively better than Cantonese for at least they might have learnt English before. However, it is competitive in getting admission in the public English schools. There are only seven government-funded or subsidized schools in the SAR catering for ethnic minority students. Together they offer 2,080 places while there is about 20,000 South Asian youngsters studying in Hong Kong<sup>66</sup>. Besides, they can also choose to attend private English schools. However, it is nearly impossible for the Nepalese family to support their children to go to private school here because of the economic factor<sup>67</sup>. Various newspapers

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<sup>66</sup> SCMP, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2000.

<sup>67</sup> However, for the successful businessmen such as Roshan and Trilok, their children are studying in private International English School which costs roughly \$5000 monthly.



have reported the schooling problem of ethnic minority children<sup>68</sup>. There is lack of vacancy in public English school, and thus many Nepalese children are on the waiting list. The waiting list is so long that no one could tell them how long they need to wait. Two years ago, YMMSS did a report about the educational needs of ethnic minority youth in Hong Kong<sup>69</sup>. According to the report, more than 20% of 593 ethnic children had to wait for more than six months to enter school. Apart from the language problem, the inadequate seat is the second major problem facing by the ethnic minority youth. Dhan had three children going to local Chinese primary school. He considered himself as a successful example of putting children in local education institutions. However, it was full of sorrow at the beginning. His elder daughter had waited for two years until she finally got admission in a local Chinese school.

*Before I tried many times. Very difficult. Two years, I everyday looking for the school...every school, high school, primary school...But they don't, not accept. I don't know this. No Chinese. So Chinese is very big problem. (Dhan)*

Perhaps Dhan's daughter was lucky enough because she was young. She still could spend time at waiting before she reaches the age 15. For some cases, there is not much time for them to spend at unpredictable waiting. They would exceeded the age that qualified for free schooling and thus losing their right of education. For instance, Ganesh came to Hong Kong when he was only 14. However, he waited for two years before he got admission in local school. When he tried to get assist through Education Department, the officer rejected his request because he was older than fifteen at that time<sup>70</sup>. Obviously, the present education system cannot answer the need of ethnic minorities. One extreme case reported by Tin Tin Daily that Education Department did provide booklets about schools for ethnic minorities

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<sup>68</sup> Appledaily, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2000; Oriental Daily 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2000; Eastweek 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2000; Mingpao, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2000; 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2000; 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2001; 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2001; SCMP 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2000; Ubeat, 40.

<sup>69</sup> *Educational Needs and Social adaptation of Ethnic Minority Youth in Hong Kong*, Yau Memorial Methodist Social Service Yau Tsim District Outreaching Social Work Team, 2000.

students to apply, but all the information was printed in Chinese<sup>71</sup>. Clearly, the policy maker does not see the need of ethnic minorities and reluctant to assist them.

Seeing the educational problem of Nepalese children, some parents prefer their children studying in Nepal's Boarding School to here. Meanwhile, some Nepalese gathered money and established school for the Nepalese children specifically. Poinsettia Primary School is a representative instance. Nevertheless, government did not give much support to those ethnic minorities schools. It was ironic for Poinsettia to receive all the teaching materials, such as teaching guidelines from Education Department, were all in Chinese<sup>72</sup>. Perhaps Education Department has never noted that staffs and students are non-Chinese speakers there. Those Chinese materials are inapplicable and useless for the school. In fact, this is unacceptable mistake. It is common sense that every educational institution has to be registered in the Education Department before it operates legally. In other words, the government does have record for each school and knows their background very well. However, the government simply ignores the special needs of those schools but treats them as other local schools. Once again, this style of government administration shows the political ignorance of existing ethnic minorities.

The schooling problem has a significant linkage with the adolescent problems such as street wanders and drug abuse. There are reports about the gangsters' fighting against each other as well. The Nepalese community indeed has an increasing rate of law violations in recent years<sup>73</sup>. Social workers had blamed that was the result of poor integration as government had failed to assist them at the first place. Even Home Affair officer admitted that the Nepalese arose government attention because of the social problem they had caused recent years. If the

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<sup>70</sup> Ming Pao 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2001.

<sup>71</sup> Tin Tin Daily 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2000.

<sup>72</sup> Oriental Daily, 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2000.

<sup>73</sup> Further readings about social problems caused by the Nepalese can be found in Apple Daily 31<sup>st</sup> October 2000; 29<sup>th</sup> December 2000; 17<sup>th</sup> July 2000; Ming Pao 16<sup>th</sup> July 2001. There was a gangster fighting between two Nepalese gangs in Wan Chai on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2001. The fighting involved with about 40 Nepalese. That was so far the most serious Nepalese trial society activities in Hong Kong.



government did not treat the Nepalese as invisible citizens, perhaps these problems would not exist.

Besides, the problem of vocational training is also severe. Again, it shows the official ignorance of the Nepalese. Lack of skill is one of the main cultural exclusion against Nepalese community. In fact, there are many different government-funded or subsidized training institutions to help workers upgrade and further their training in order to polish their career path. Vocational Training Council (VTC) is a typical example. It provides a wide range of variety in vocational education and training to meet the needs of Hong Kong economy. However, nearly all of its regular courses are taught in Cantonese. This explicitly shows the government ignorance of non-Cantonese speakers' need. While the Nepalese are being highly employed at construction industry, which requires much professional skill and safety knowledge, they undoubtedly need more related training. In fact, Hong Kong government has noted the need of quality training in construction industry and its rapid development in Hong Kong since the mid-70s. The establishment of Construction Industry Training Authority (CITA) is according to this need. However, the government neglects the need of ethnic minority workers.

*Lekha: the government polices deny to training those who are other nationals.*

*Q: o...really?*

*Lekha: yes, who non-speaker of Chinese, they don't to apply for training before going to the construction site work.*

As a high-risk professional, construction workers demand more safety trainings before they join the construction work. Insufficient training is equal to risking their life. And the denial of pre-work training obviously is a political exclusion. Even the workers have noted the dangerous of working in those fields and realize the importance of pre-work and continuous training. However, their accesses of learning are being blocked because of official failure in course planning.

*The training course, you know, the vocational training...Some*

*around here, so many, right? But when we get there, we like to study...to try their training. So but they have all Cantonese speaker for Cantonese speaker. They don't have English speaker... they say we don't have any English speaker, we only can speak Cantonese, that's why the course only for the Cantonese speaker. (Keshab)*

There are classes for non-Cantonese speaking applicants. But those are irregular classes. If the non-Chinese applicants wish to take the course, they have to wait. Like Keshab was finally able to sign up for one day training. However, he had to wait for a month later since that was an irregular course, which mostly depended on accumulation of students to certain number. In fact, as the promotion of an international city, government policies have emphasized more on upgrading service. To provide a bilingual service is also one of the targets. However, it is ironic to see how less work that government has done for the non-Chinese speakers in providing trainings. One time Keshab asked me to translate some CITA booklets for him because CITA only had booklets in Chinese. He thought the booklets were useful for the Nepalese workers. He wanted to share them with his friends.

*Many Nepalese are working in construction, we need to know that. But they don't have English. We can't read the Chinese. So if we translate in Nepali, may be better for us. (Keshab)*

The booklets cover the application procedures, guidelines and examples of trade tests held by CITA. All skilled construction labours, such as welders, have to pass the trade test and get certificate from CITA before they work. Hence, the content of those trade tests is very important and useful for every construction workers. Keshab showed me the booklets from CITA. All booklets had both English and Chinese on the cover page. However, their content was all in Chinese solely. Keshab was so disappointed after he knew about the content.

*I got so many of them. I thought they were useful. But it is no use. It is about the application procedures. But everyone knows that. And they did not give this booklet away, we can only get it from their center. But when we are in the center, we already know the procedures of application. So no use. (Keshab)*



Lack of training is a fatal cause of many Nepalese working as a non-skilled labourer and leading a harsh life. Once again, although everyone is eligible for joining those courses, the Nepalese are being excluded because of the language inability. So, they could not receive professional training. These are typical instances of obvious vicious result of policy ignorance. Even they are supposed to have the same rights, the governmental policies and planning suppress their rights and privileges.

#### 4.4.2 Uninformed Rights

In fact, having the ROA, the Nepalese are indeed supposed to be able to enjoy all the rights, privileges and obligations as other Hong Kong citizens<sup>74</sup>. However, ethnic minorities undoubtedly face many practical difficulties in integrating into the majority and enjoy their rights as others citizens. They are being uninformed about their rights. Generally interviewees, for instance did not know their right to vote. One informant was a permanent ID holder and over 18. Undoubtedly, he was qualified to vote. However, he questioned if he had the right. In fact, he told me that no one ever mentioned their right to vote and issues of election among his friends and relatives. They had no clue about it. Likewise, they have no idea how to access the sources of knowing their right. In other words, those rights simply exist and yet they are “inapplicable” to the Nepalese because of language barrier. Even for some general policies, the Nepalese also do not know much. The application procedure for renting the governmental house is a typical example. That also explains that most Nepalese stay in expensive private rental house.

*I want to buy the house in Hong Kong. I know buy the house from government is cheaper. But I don't know the process. I don't know how. (Keshab)*

Besides, they are not well informed about their obligations. One representative example is being unknown about the regulations and laws until they offended.

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<sup>74</sup> *Right of Abode 2000, Version 3.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government SAR

There was news about the Nepalese killing the pig illegally in Yuen Long. Two Nepalese were arrested. In fact, I doubt if they had known that was illegal in Hong Kong. One interviewee told me that he spent most of his holidays at joining friends to slaughter pigs together. According to him, that was the cheapest way to get the meat they preferred. Besides, they could kill it in their traditional way, which was regarded as “merciless” killing according to the officer of Environment and Food Bureau<sup>75</sup>. Here offers an example that the Nepalese are illiterate of local laws. The government does have the responsibility to let its citizens being well informed of their obligations and duties.

A further typical example is the controversial court decision about village chief election in New Territories. On December 22, 2000 the Court of Final Appeal granted non-indigenous villagers the right to vote and stand as candidates of the village chief<sup>76</sup>. There are over thousands Nepalese living in 13 Kam Tin, including Tai Hong Wai where over 80% population are Nepalese. Just after the news of the court’s ruling, Roshan Limbu appeared on televisions announcing his wish to be the village representative. However, his move raised the tension between indigenous and the Nepalese residents. Indigenous viewed it as a dangerous move. From indigenous’ point of views, the Nepalese were “foreigner”<sup>77</sup> after all. They refused to accept a foreigner being their leader. On the other hand, the discussion did not attract much attention inside the Nepalese community while the ruling was widely reported by the local media. According SCMP reports, many of the Tai Hong Wai’s Nepalese residents were unaware of Limbu’s move since they were unable to read the newspaper and understand television news. Once again, the vote privilege is inapplicable to them as they are not being informed. Furthermore, living in the traditional villages with the locals, they are being treated as outsider and being excluded fundamentally from participating the political activities such as having

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<sup>75</sup> Appledaily, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2002

<sup>76</sup> SCMP, 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2000.



representative in the political agencies.

The waiting period of getting ID card is also an instance of political exclusion facing by the Nepalese. This issue illustrates the suppression of political rights. Normally, the waiting time is shorter when people apply for ROA instead of dependent visa. But there is no fixed time for the Immigration Department to process the applications. During the waiting period, applicants on recognizance can remain staying in Hong Kong. However, they are not allowed to work or enter school. In other words, they are excluded from all kind of productive activities except wait patiently. What's worse, most of them have not been informed about the waiting period. The waiting period of my interviews is various. Some had just waited for few weeks, for example Bindiya waited only for about 20 days before she got her ID. But some had to wait for nearly half years. For instance, Sarmila waited for her ID card nearly six months. She complained that she could not do anything besides stayed at home. The waiting period of dependent visa applicants is even longer as it takes longer time to do the investigation. Pawan waited for one year to get his dependent visa.

*Actually I am not here to do some jobs. I am here just to take the ID and just come back and studies...My mum forces me to come here and make the ID, you know... so I am here to make the ID, it was take one year. One year and so long time. And I cannot do nothing because I don't have ID then I cannot do. (Pawan)*

Some interviewees came to Hong Kong while they were studying in Nepal. However, they finally gave up their studies because they had to stay here, and waited for the process of their ID card. Pawan and Sarmila are examples. In spite of the increasing amount of applications, the suspicious on fake applications also causes the Immigration Department spending more time on investigation and processing each application. Some of informant's friends had to wait as long as two years. As illustrated above, the waiting period is equal to a blank phase because they cannot do anything without the ID card. This is obvious a political

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<sup>77</sup> SCMP, 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2001.

exclusion. At least, they should be informed about the possible waiting period.

As a conclusion, government apparently neglects the need of ethnic minorities. In the whole future planning, policies concerning ethnic minorities have not been put in the agenda until recent years. Unlike sex and family status, there is no specific ordinance about against racial discrimination in Hong Kong. Although discrimination exists and being complaint by NGOs many years<sup>78</sup>, there is no policy banning racial discrimination in Hong Kong. As Human Rights Commission chairman Ho Hei-wah says, “*neglect of ethnic minority migrants is discriminatory in nature*”<sup>79</sup>.

In 1996/97, Home Affair Bureau (HAB) conducted a study of consultations on racial discrimination in Hong Kong. However, according to Miss Liyen Chen (Executive Officer, HAB division seven), that time the majority of public disagreed to introduction of a law prohibiting racial discrimination since the racial discrimination was not sufficiently serious to warrant the enactment legislation. So on the basis of the findings, Governor in Executive Council directed that HAB should address the issue through public education and administrative means. For the public education, HAB devoted in publications for adults and children, advertising campaigns on television or other media, promoting and funding community based projects. HAB also published the *Code of practice Against Racial Discrimination in Employment* in 1998. It provided guidelines for workers and employers on the avoidance of discrimination in the working place. HAB also produced a series of guide to Hong Kong in different languages, including English, Filipinos, Indonesians, and so on. The Nepali version was published in the end of 2000. Furthermore, HAB promotes and sponsors activities through the Equal Opportunities (Race and Sexual Orientation) Funding Scheme since 1998.

Five years after the first consultations on racial discrimination, HAB considers

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<sup>78</sup> SCMP, 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2000.

<sup>79</sup> SCMP, 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2000.



that the time has come to engage the community in an active dialogue on the need for legislation in this area again. They conducted another consultation paper in 2001. It supposed to be finished in the early 2002. However, Liyen Chen told me that it was still in process in March, 2002. The process is rather slow.

*We are still waiting for the reply from organizations of ethnic minorities...our staffs called up each organization and asked them about their opinion. They cannot give us any opinion or suggestions, even we just ask them a yes/no opinion. So we are still waiting for them. Now we are receiving more and more "yes and no" answers from other ethnic minorities associations. (Liyen, Executive officer of HAB)*

Indeed, Hong Kong government has become more active in helping the Nepalese community and try to "*fulfill their needs*" (Liyen) in the last few years. The annual meeting with different Nepalese organizations is an example. The Nepalese also appreciate what the government has done, but like Sankar said, "*now a little bit Hong Kong government also provides to minority group, like us, but not enough*". To treat the Nepalese fairly as other citizens, perhaps there is still much room for the government to improve.

I have illustrated the political exclusion against the Nepalese by policy ignorance and uninformed rights. The Nepalese are being treated as invisible citizens. Marshall defines the political citizenship including right to vote and the right to participate in the central government organs. Obviously, the Nepalese are still unable to enjoy their right to vote although they are eligible for it. The political exclusion against them simply because of governmental ignorance of their existence. Treating the Nepalese community as invisible and thus unconcern their needs, lack of official planning or preparation for their integration, consequently the Nepalese are disadvantaged in many aspects that the government has the main responsibility. Some active members of the community have also noted the problem. They organize together and strike for their rights. In fact, they use their right of assembly and right of organization. This is a significant step towards to citizenship fulfillment. To approach complete citizenship is actually aiming at

social integration and actively moving forward to combat the social exclusion. Their aims are clear. Chapter Six will elaborate more about this process.

#### 4.5 Conclusion: Marginal Man

In sum, the description of exclusions against the Nepalese fit the description of Robert E. Park's idea of *marginal man*<sup>80</sup>. Park (1950) coins the term "marginal man" in his book *Race and Culture*. It refers to the individual whose face is to be born into, and to live on the margins of two cultures. The Nepalese migrants obviously live at the margins of Hong Kong society. I was curious that the Nepalese chose to live in Hong Kong continuously when their situation was so dreadful here. Lekha explained the dilemma of choosing to be excluded. In fact, those Nepalese are also being excluded from their hometown as well.

*Like Gurkha family, they are outside from the country since a long period; they don't have any chance in their country. Their education, their experience...everything from outside. (Lekha)*

Lekha only provided half explanation for the exclusion against the Gurkhas families in Nepal. It is true that the Nepalese join military at young age. Eventually they have more military training instead of academic education since "*in the time of education, they have military (Lekha)*". Dipendra joined the Gurkha's boy service when he was 14 years old and retired from the army at 42 years old. Like many Gurkhas, he had spent half of his life in the army outside Nepal. Like Lekha said, their experiences and education were from outside. Despite their experiences are inapplicable to their life in the homeland, they also suffer the unfamiliarity of homeland after being absent for years. In fact, they are no different from a new immigrant when they return to homeland.

To discuss the homeland exclusion against the Gurkhas family, we definitely cannot miss the Nepalese cultural background, which determines the Nepalese migrants' destiny of being excluded at the very beginning. Nepal is an ethnic



heterogeneity country. Its practice of caste system allows the country's economic resources and political power being monopolized by the upper caste Hindu elites: Brahmans and Chhetris. They control about 70 to 90 per cent of the total key political, bureaucratic, military and police positions (Yamanaka 2000). Other ethnic minorities are lack of political clout in the national politics. Hence, Yamanaka points out that consequently the Mongols groups, i.e. Gurungs, Magars, Rais and Limbus have relied for economic survival on recruitment into British army and Indian army. What's more, this long-standing tradition of foreign military service cultivates a "culture of emigration" among Nepal's 'Mongol' minorities. The socialization in the Gurkhas family shows this unique culture.

Boys grow up in the family's expectation that they will follow their forefathers' tradition of Gurkha service in foreign lands. Girls are encouraged to marry affluent retired military 'pensioners' or soldiers who will be absent for nearly twenty years...(Yamanaka 2000:5)

As boys grow up in the expectation of joining the military training, education is not their first priority. In fact, it is never emphasized at their young age. After all, the basic requirement of the Gurkhas focuses on physical fitness rather than academic attainment.

*They only hire those who don't know much English. Those who can only write their name in English and from A to Z, that's all. They never hire someone high educated. (Keshab)*

Keshab knew the requirements of the Gurkha very well. Being the son of a Gurkha Sergeant, he tried to follow his father's footsteps into the British Army but failed. Like thousands of Gurkhas descendants, he responded to the Gurkhas recruitment since he was 18 until 23 when his age was not qualified anymore. He finally decided to come to Hong Kong and gave up his tertiary education. Apart from the little opportunity of education<sup>81</sup>, the look down of education among

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<sup>80</sup> Park, R. E. 1950. *Race and Culture*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.

<sup>81</sup> Camala is among the few females who obtains Master degree, especially given that Nepal is not only practicing a hierarchical caste system but also being male-dominated in many social aspects. She told me that, there were only 2 to 3 per cent students from Mongol groups and the rest was Aryans when she studied in the university. She blamed that was the historical mistake which

Gurkhas families has further excluded them from society as they paid less attention and effort on education than other castes. This apparently worsens their situation.

*Because British people hire us to the army, we stop our education and think about join the army all the time. Other caste is different. They never thought about joining the army, so they have more education. My caste people never go to higher education. We stop in the secondary level and join the army. We know we are going to join the army since we are little... That's the only choice we have...There is no job for us, because we are not educated. (Keshab)*

The Gurkha family locates at nearly the bottom of the caste system. They suffer multiple social disadvantages including civil, political and economic. Even they are lucky enough to finish the tertiary education, they still cannot find a decent job there because of their caste despite the poor national economic condition.

*Even we studied in the graduation level...we can't find nice job in our country. We will not enough with our payment. (Ambar)*

Besides joining the British army, the only left option for them is being farmer. Like other developing countries, Nepal's economic heavily relies on agriculture instead of other industries. The majority of its population are farmers in Nepal. Life of farmer is extremely harsh and more importantly, their income is unstable. Jayanti told me straightly the reason of the Nepalese staying in Hong Kong, "so many people, they don't want to be a farmer." Hence, they have to seek for opportunities in other places like Hong Kong.

*In Nepal, so no construction, no industrial area, so no job, looking for job, need go to other countries, like Hong Kong like this. (Diwash)*

Almost every interviewee told me that their reason of coming to Hong Kong was for job opportunities. They repeatedly stated the push factors of poor economic, cultural and political condition in Nepal. Like Mira came here to work as domestic helper first, she cried out that, "if we live in Nepal, we can't job, we cannot get a job, any job." Indeed, the unfavorable caste system has put them at

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resulted the Mongols being less educated. Even before the emancipation in 1992, Mongols could



the margin position in Nepal.

As the caste system has begun to fade out a bit after the democratic emancipation, Gurkhas parents have high expectation on children's education in order to break the vicious cycle of exclusion in their homeland. That is another crucial reason of the Nepalese migrants coming Hong Kong for work. They are here for their children's future.

*In Nepal, we cannot get more money, to give better education for our children. We cannot afford only from our salary. In Hong Kong, we are working here, if we can make, we can afford them high education, to go to university... (Yogan)*

However, they still cannot escape the fate of being excluded because of their long period of absence from the homeland. As Lekha mentioned, everything they have are from foreign country (such as Hong Kong). They scarify their sentiment of homeland, friends and relatives when they decide to migrate to other countries. Even though they do return for home visit once a while, that still cannot avoid the strangeness. They are sentimentally excluded. This explains the feeling of lonesomeness during the home visit. Indeed, the fear of feeling lonely is a reason keeping the Gurkhas families staying in Hong Kong continuously instead of return to homeland, Nepal.

*This time, may be only they know who are my friend, the rest one. But there all the people they don't know when I go visit there. It has been long, long time, you know. And the old people, some of them die already if we know. The small people they don't know. (Keshab)*

In conclusion, Robert Park's *marginal man* is the best description for the Nepalese community in Hong Kong. Firstly, they are excluded from homeland because of their culturally disadvantage which leads to economic and political exclusion against them. Consequently, they have to rely for economic survival on overseas recruitment. However, when they live in foreign country, they also face problem of social exclusion due to multiple disadvantages. In addition, after

absence from homeland for years, the Gurkhas and their families are further excluded from the homeland due to the unfamiliarity of homeland. In other words, they suffer exclusion not only in Hong Kong but also in their homeland, Nepal. They live in both societies' margins. They are marginal men.

This chapter has comprehensively described the social exclusion against the Nepalese in Hong Kong. One of the advantages of the concept social exclusion is its flexible definition (Silver 1995). Its definition is defined specifically to the concerned social context, i.e. Hong Kong in this thesis. Hence, the definition provides an important insight of understanding the social culture of the concerned society. Scholars have argued that four modes of exclusions can be identified in society. They are the cultural, economic, civil and political exclusions. Based on this categorization, I define each mode in terms of different themes uncovered in the fieldwork. The cultural exclusion involves inaccessible cultural capitals including language, skills and knowledge. The economic exclusion has to do with 4D work which are dirty, dangerous, demanding and devalued. The civil exclusion involves their second-class citizens and distant friends. The political exclusion is the problem invisible citizens. These themes in fact reflect the social cultures of Hong Kong. As observed from the interviews, interviewees were more concerned with the first three modes of exclusions, and few of them mention the political exclusion. The phenomenon mirrors the priority of their concerns as well. Less attention being paid at the political exclusion can be interpreted as itself a result of exclusion. This is one of the extreme exclusions that the excluded party does not even sense the existence of exclusion and hence does not complain about it. In fact, the four arenas interplay with each other. Their dynamics have created and reinforced the web of social exclusion. The community suffers a lot from it.



## Chapter 5     Malign Dynamics Among Modes of Exclusions

*I can say that people cannot survive here. They have to struggle...no struggle, no hard thing you would do, you cannot survive here. (Pawan)*

I have descriptively described the condition of the Nepalese in Hong Kong. Four modes of exclusions are found in the Nepalese community including cultural, economic, civil and political exclusion. The definition I have given to different modes of exclusion is according to Hong Kong's unique social context. This fits in with Silver's description that the definition of social exclusion should reflect the social culture of the concerned society. Although Rodger (1995) has pointed out that focusing on process is one of the main feature of social exclusion, the past studies seldom give a concrete definition of the causal relationship among these exclusions, nor their priority among each other. However, based upon the finding of this thesis, I argue that the dynamics among modes of exclusions apparently exist. Four modes of exclusions reinforce and interweave with each other. Thus, they become a vicious cycle of exclusion. In this section, I will exam the dynamics between exclusions and try to portray the web of social exclusion against the Nepalese. Meanwhile, there is different degree of seriousness among the dynamics. The dynamic between cultural exclusion and economic exclusion (5.1) and the dynamic between cultural exclusion and civil exclusion (5.2) bothers the Nepalese community the most. Most interviewees have pointed out their disadvantages due to these two types of dynamics. The following section will focus much on both dynamics. The rest dynamics are also influential in creating the vicious cycle, but they are less obvious and thus less emphasize in this studies.

### 5.1 Cultural Exclusion - Economic Exclusion

The severe cultural exclusion against the Nepalese is the inaccessibility of cultural capital including language and skill. The inability of language application and skill does take a crucial role in constraining which types of economic activities

they can participate, i.e. types of economic exclusion they may encounter. Meanwhile, they are also being dominated and occupied by economic activities and thus they certainly do not have time to do other things. In other words, economic exclusion limits their chance of acquire cultural capitals. Cultural and economic exclusion explicitly has a vicious dynamic in between. First, cultural exclusion enhance at least two types of economic exclusions, i.e. unemployment and limit of choice.

#### 5.1.1 *"If you not speak Cantonese, then we can't get the job there."* – Unemployment

As I described in Chapter Four, unemployment is a vital economic exclusion in the Nepalese community. The Nepalese have difficulty due to their disadvantages in language and skill. Many interviewees pointed out that the major difficulty of job hunt was the language problem. In fact, English is also acceptable in some construction companies when most Nepalese having higher English standard than their Cantonese standard. However, the majority of sub-contractors in Hong Kong's construction industry are Chinese companies. They look for the Chinese workers eventually.

*English company, people who speak English, we speak English, if we try, we can get the job there. In the Chinese company, they don't speak English, when we speak English, they don't want to listen, right? If we know how to speak Cantonese, we can find the job easily. (Machhindra, translated by Keshab)*

Due to the inability of language application, many interviewees experience hardship in job hunting and thus suffer various length of unemployment period. Referring the solution of unemployment, many of them held the view like Udeep, *"if I can speak Cantonese, I can find the job."* Suresh was jobless for about nine months after Chek Lap Kok project. He tried very hard to find job during that period. But he failed to fulfill the primary criterion when he got the job interview.

*When I try to find a job...then...can you speak Cantonese, 少少啊! 識聽啊! (Little, I can listen.) Then they speak, they speak, you know,*



*very fast. I can't understand. 呢個唔得架! (This one cannot)...nearly nine months, very bad months in my life. (Suresh)*

In spite of some Nepalese containing low English standard, employer's English standard also relates to the difficulties of their job hunt. After all, English is not the prevalent medium of communication in Hong Kong. Surya came here simply wanted to make his ID and found an easy job. However, although he could speak quite fluent English but the situation was not as easy as he thought.

*Now we know the situation to get the job is very, very difficult, specially to us because our problem is the language. Because it is very difficult to communicate with Chinese. We don't know the Cantonese. And some of the Chinese people don't know the English...That way, now we are very difficult to get job in Hong Kong. (Surya)*

Yogan also faced the language problem when he searched job. He was tired of people asking about his ability of spoken Cantonese. He argued that the ability of communication should not be the first priority in his work, welder in construction. In fact, he is right that construction work is relatively less communicative compared with other fields. However, when the Nepalese even have language problem while looking for jobs in construction field, the same problem they face in other fields is probably even worse.

*When I used to go to labour department, in the labour department officer asked me do you know the Cantonese, I am sorry, sir, I don't know Cantonese. Every time, they ask me. One time I ask them, but I think in the construction site, there is not need to use Cantonese for communication. Mostly we don't use it. (Yogan)*

The language problem is more critical problem particularly in the customer-oriented industry, such as catering. Sarmila had been jobless for more than two months. Due to her working experience as a waitress, she looked for vacancy in catering as well. Since all her colleagues spoke English in the previous working place, she did not realize the importance of Cantonese until recently when she looked for a new job.

*Like this moment, I don't know Cantonese, wherever I go, looking for interview for a job, they ask, I don't know Cantonese. But before*



*one year, I don't think it is very, very important. But this time, I think it is very important. (Sarmila)*

Mira agreed that language was a “hard problem”. Mira pointed out that the majority of the Nepalese were low in standard of Cantonese and English and that caused their high rate of unemployment. She further criticized that the Nepalese’s mindset was being occupied by their work instead of thinking critically about the language problem. She made sense of being unemployed by reasoning the disfeature of language matter. It shows the internalization of the rationale of being dominated. It is also part of the process of making sense of their living world.

*People only thinks only hard and easily work, they cannot thinks about the language, about his own practical, own, how to say...if we have good language, if we have our good practical...we can get a job, we can get a job easily. But if I cannot speak Cantonese, I cannot speak English, then how can get a job? Who give me job? (Mira)*

For those who can neither speak Cantonese nor English, they suffer double disadvantages. They are being more marginalized in the market. Camala, the chairlady of the Nepalese Women Association, argued that many Nepalese women had such double disadvantages and directed the difficulty in earning a living in Hong Kong.

*There is the difficulty to speak Cantonese...this is the main thing our women facing nowadays. Speaking Cantonese, if they can speak fluent Cantonese, they will get better job. But they don't have any Cantonese speaking class...and then, they cannot speak English also...if they can speak English, no problem. They can understand, to some extents, they can understand. But they cannot reply. That is the problem. (Camala)*

Besides, skill is also another significant cultural capital that the Nepalese are lack of and thus suffers high unemployment rate. As I mentioned before, few Nepalese obtained skill before they came to Hong Kong. Generally they either pick up skill on job training and promote to skilled job or participate in those unskilled works continuously. However, there are few jobs that do not have much language and skill criteria. Construction indeed is a less communicative work, but unskilled work is actually very limited. Posts of construction labourers are among



few that offer for unskilled workers. That explains the concentration of the Nepalese participating in the field. However, the field is also very competitive because of no prerequisite. Simply everyone can do the job. In other words, being unskilled is also being substitutable. Keshab mentioned the difficulty of surviving as labourer.

*They are unskilled. For the labourer is very difficult because they are only have little skill, just the man is ok...low pay, also very difficult because if everybody can do, people can do the job also, the same...we are trained, our skill, the mostly they don't know how to use the machine... few number of we have the skill. (Keshab)*

Different from skilled workers, unskilled people are more frequently being underemployed or unemployed. For example, Kusum was one of them. She worked as a construction labourer before. However, she lost her job after she had accident. She had been unemployed more than nine months. She tried every method such as agencies and network of friends, but she could not find any job in other fields because she was unskilled. She is a typical example for many other unskilled Nepalese

On the contrary, it is easier for those skilled labours to find job and escape from being unemployed. Ex-Gurkhas are distinctive examples. They had military trainings and became professional soldier. Consequently, it is easy for them to find similar type of job, such as security guard, after they retired from the army. Parbin pointed out this advantage directly in the interview. What's more, security guard is relatively stable and permanent job. Therefore, it is seldom to hear an ex-Gurkha being jobless.

*Because we are ex-Gurkha, it is easy to find job in security if we are under 45. We have the certificate so easy to find job. Easy to get the security job from \$6000 to \$8000 or \$10000 to \$12000. It is good salary. (Parbin)*

No wonder that many ex-Gurkhas are proud of their previously training which assists them in the retiring life. They are living examples in the Nepalese community that skill is an essential criterion of escaping from excessive form of

economic exclusion, i.e. unemployment.

*Why I work for the security guiding service because of solider, I was professional solider, I was good that, excellent. So I work.*  
(Bholanath)

Same story happens in other fields as well. Skill is a cultural capital that protects workers from unemployment. Keshab told me that some of his friends acquired the knowledge and skill for work before they immigrated to Hong Kong. Those friends found and maintained their job easily. Arun was one of them. He picked up the skill of bamboo scaffolding from his job. His example is just a contrasting example to those unskilled workers. In fact, he was also unskilled when he arrived in Hong Kong in 1995. He joined the construction involuntary since there was no other choice for him. When he realized the need of obtaining skill in order to be more competitive in the job market, he learned it from Chinese colleagues. There was time that he was frustrated in the construction work and would like to change to other fields but in vain. He resigned from the construction work once. Later he was still able to join in again easily because he got the skill. Now his skill protects him from being unemployed even when Hong Kong's economy is shrinking and many contraction workers face problem of layoff.

#### 5.1.2 “No choice to change job...” - Limit of Choices

Cultural exclusion also limits the choices of Nepalese economic activities. Due to lack of cultural capitals specifically language and skill, they are only qualified for those unskillful as well as less communicative jobs. Those are the most tedious, unskilled, precarious and manual jobs which I have summarized as 4D jobs (dirty, dangerous, demanding and devalued). However, in a developed city like Hong Kong, these types of job are limited in number and rank at the bottom in the sense of economic income as well as social status. After all, nowadays our society concentrates to develop the tertiary business and promotes life learning as the major step to upgrade life. That explains the reason of majority of the Nepalese



being concentrated at several typical industries such as hard labourers in construction, security guards, servants in catering and cleaners in various industries. More often, their rights and welfare are being overlooked. For some Nepalese, they have even internalized the rationale of being excluded from economic market due to lack of cultural capital. Some Nepalese seem like “accepting” this situation. In fact, they have no other option besides acceptance.

Having only clerical experience in the non-government organization in Nepal, Yogan wanted to do the office job when he arrived in Hong Kong. However, he found that was something impossible for him because of language barrier. Besides, he did not have any special skill. He came at the time that a lot of construction projects were going on. Those projects provided many vacancies for unskilled workers. He eventually joined in the construction and learnt skill there.

*When I came here, it was language problem for any office job. I did not search any office...It was easy to find the construction job in 1996 to 1997. At that time, the economic of Hong Kong was not that bad. It was easily that I can find the construction job. (Yogan)*

Exclusion from several cultural sectors (language, skill and knowledge of the host society) causes and interacts with economic exclusion, and thus leads the Nepalese having a harsh life in Hong Kong. Lalit summed up the constraints facing by most Nepalese when he gave remarks on his life in Hong Kong. They have no choice of choosing occupation at all.

*Difficult, everything difficult...it is difficult to find job for Nepalese now. All construction site is nearly finished. We have no other skill...we don't know how to speak English, how to write. We don't know Cantonese, how to write Cantonese...no choice to change job to other place. (Lalit)*

As a matter of fact, many of them have already internalized and rationalized this situation. Like in Amrit's case, he was a primary teacher in Nepal, but he became a construction labourer in Hong Kong. He seemed taking this drastic change well because he had already expected this fateful situation before he decided to come here. He understood his disadvantage of being unskilled.

*Q: so before you came here, did you know you were going to work in construction site?*

*Amrit: yes, I heard. And I thought...if I'm staying in Hong Kong I should work it in the construction site as a labour...because especially we don't know any Cantonese...We can't write, we can't speak. And next we don't have train also. Just, I thought if I want to work, I should work here as a labour.*

Like many others, Mira wanted to have an easy and comfortable job in Hong Kong especially she had health problem. She looked for easy job which in her words “*inside work, inside the office like that, like that job is easy because not sunshine, like that and no need to do the hard work like that*”. However, she was jobless for few months. Finally, she had to comprise with the reality. She had limit of choice due to cultural exclusion. She had no other choice but worked as a general labourer in a flower garden. Her work was outdoor and physical demanding job. She expressed her disappointment of the situation.

*When which day is very sunshine, then means very hot, then I also think that is very hard to work outside. Very hot. But what we can do? What we can do? We cannot speak good Chinese, good English, then how to find the easy job? (Mira)*

Bhabin's experience was also typical among interviewees. Bhabin came to Hong Kong after he finished high school. He tried construction work but in vain because of being unskilled. Finally, he joined the catering business. He also expressed the difficulty of finding job at the beginning since “*the communication is not suitable for me because I can't speak Chinese.*” He switched several working places due to different reasons. And he was unemployed for a few months before he settled in his present job. He pointed out that language was an element not only setting up as gate for non-Cantonese speaker to enter the economic activity, but also limiting the fields of economic activities.

*Even for restaurant side, we can't get the job without Cantonese... that's why most of the Nepalese, they are working...in the Indian restaurant, Nepalese restaurant, and some of them just speak well English...if the management mix up, they can get the job. If only like the Chinese people in management, they can't get the job. (Bhabin)*



Pawan was the youngest interviewee. He studied in so-called English School, which had better ranking than government school in Nepal. Through interview, I had no doubt on his spoken English. Additionally, his Cantonese was greatly improved over the last few years when he worked with a Chinese boss. Privately, he also took Cantonese class. Even being advantaged in both spoken language, however, his choice is no much different from others. At present, he worked as a general labourer in a construction site as well. He did try to find administrative work, but experience and language was the biggest hurdle.

*We don't have any experience...every time I used to read the newspaper...looking for the job, I just look at the F.5, yes, it is ok. And looking one year experience, two-year experience, and down it say, writing like this must be fluent in Cantonese, Putonghua...no good for me. So that's the problem. We cannot find the good one... we don't have choice. We don't have chance. (Pawan)*

Likewise, he criticized the limit of choices being provided by the host community. Jobs were over-emphasis of language and experience. In fact, those are cultural capitals what most Nepalese are lack of and hence, being excluded from most of the local economic activities.

*Even I can speak little Chinese, not fluent, but even I cannot find the job, and so how people who don't understand what Chinese people saying the thing to them, so can they find the job? And mostly important thing is Chinese people they don't hire us also because of the language. Everything is language. (Pawan)*

There are some jobs that originally do not “force” the Nepalese to speak in Cantonese. For instance, the post of insurance agency did not require ability of spoken Cantonese previously when its market was the Nepalese community. Roshan was a district manager of insurance company. Having seen the great potential of the Nepalese insurance market, he started to recruit the Nepalese agents under his district to develop the market few years ago. In the past, he mainly required his agents to be presentable in their native language, i.e. Nepali. In spite of all, that was the language of their targeted market. However, now he required more than that as the environment of the whole industry changed greatly recent

years. The Nepalese agents finally come to the language problem. They have to take the professional examination either in Cantonese or in English. Even though, his agents received relatively high educational attainment<sup>82</sup>, they also face the same difficulty as other Nepalese.

*The present problem for Nepalese agents is the coming professional examination... Nepalese agents worry that they can't pass the examination. If they failed, they would have to change the job by the end of this year. They worry too much and not dare to try. You know, they are in the mood of giving up. I gave them personal tuition...the problem is their English fundamentally poor. (Roshan)*

Both Pawan and Roshan stated an advanced limitation for the Nepalese relating to the language matter, i.e. written. While most Nepalese has stopped at the entrance of economic activity because of incapable to speaking Cantonese, some of them have already tackled the problem and yet they reach other gate – written matter. When the spoken matter already arise great difficulty, it is imaginable that the written problem is even harder. Comparing with many Nepalese, Kopila had more cultural capitals that advanced her in job hunting. Firstly, she spoke quite fluent Cantonese. Secondly, she also had training and experience in different fields. However, she was still lack of confidence and sense of security about working in Hong Kong. In fact, having a dependent visa holder, she depended much on her work and income, which showed her capability of taking care herself in the economic sense. This was one of the main required conditions for her to extend her staying in Hong Kong. Her present job was a messenger in an Indian company. Her previously experience in job hunting made her worry much about the security of work. Her case evidently shows the series of cultural barriers against the Nepalese to participate in local economic activities.

*Sometimes I am also scared if I will lose my job or find another job is very hard. Because we don't have really...much more experience and then we don't speak, even I can speak Cantonese, but I cannot write, I cannot read the Cantonese. Some of the hotel I also tried, because I was working in hotel before and also I have the training.*

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<sup>82</sup> All his agents have attained above secondary school level.



*I have applied so many hotel...they just require the Mandarin and then also the write. (Kopila)*

Language is not only an essential factor of participating what type of economic activities, but also a determinant criterion of promotion in work. Yogan spoke very few Cantonese. He claimed that he could only speak commanding words for work. He observed that the Chinese had the advantage of spoken language, which facilitated his communication with others. Also, communication is highly emphasized especially in industries that highly demand on division of labour. Thus, the Chinese was always being promoted as the foreman despite his level of skill. In other words, the Nepalese have worse economic mobility compared with Chinese due to the language problem.

*Because when we work with the Chinese people, due to the language problem, suppose we are four to five welders, one Chinese welder, he is the senior because he can communicate with others. (Yogan)*

Moreover, skill also significantly limits people's choice of work. To large extent, skill has fixed people to certain type of economic activities as well. This is evidently showed by interviewee's working history. As most of them have such limited skill, their choice of work is certainly little. Thus, they seldom changed their working field. Or if they did change, their choice was bound with certain fields, such as construction, security and catering fields. For instance, Sarmila did not change field of work even she had been unemployed for few months. She worked as waitress since she came to Hong Kong. She lost her job and looked for the vacancy in catering field again even she knew no many vacancies in the field. She had no other choice because she did not have any specific skill or experience in other fields.

Skill is the prerequisite for some industries. For example, nearly all of construction posts requires specific training and skill because construction field has inherent dangerous among its works. Employing unskilled workers for some positions is risking workers' life at accident. For some responsible companies,

pre-job training is given to employees. But in those cases, employees may not get any salary from the period of pre-job training. In other words, unskilled workers would have to work without pay for certain period in order to have the on job training. However, there is no guarantee that company would continue the employment after the so-call “on job training” period. That is definitely devalued process (monetary rewards). That makes the cultural capital, i.e. skill, become more inaccessible.

*They asked me to work there for two weeks free in charge. Free in charge means they pay us. Since I don't have experience working in construction site...I have to go there everyday. But I don't get any traffic allowance or anything. (Bhabin)*

In short, cultural capitals (both language and skill) have great impact on the economic exclusion against the Nepalese particularly in the issues of unemployment and limited choice. Also, language is no doubt more important than skill regarding the impact on job hunt. Regardless of rich experience and skill, Machhindra experienced jobless due to the language problem. Having realized the importance of spoken dialect, Machhindra lied to his present employer about his ability of spoken Cantonese. He got the job after he lied. His experience once again proves the essential of spoken Cantonese in avoiding exclusion from the economic activities.

*My boss calling me, you speak the Chinese, yes, I speak Chinese. You know Chinese? Yes, I know Chinese. But I am not speak Chinese...I chatting the boss, and then I go the company, and then, my foreman tell me, you know, 講啊! 我講啊! (say it, I say it.) like this, all Chinese...not understand. (Machhindra)*

To extend the analysis on devaluation, skill is more determinant factor in workers' payment. Most of the construction posts are required certain skill. For those posts, skill and experience becomes the most important thing as companies “pay according to our skill and experience” (Keshab). As mentioned above, construction was in its golden age from 1994 to 1997 while New Airport Project was under construction. During that period, the salary of construction workers had



reached its peak. Normally the daily salary for a skilled labour was around \$1200 per day. But, there was a polarization of salary between skilled workers and unskilled labourers. Bhabin tried to join the construction in 1996 when he was only 19. However, the company only offered him one-sixth of the normal rate.

*They may think at that time I was too young and I did not have experience. At that time, some experienced worker get over \$1200, \$1300 per day. The salary should be very good there. But they just paid me \$200 per day. That was too low. (Bhabin)*

### 5.1.3 “The only thing is we have very tight time.” - Job Domination

While cultural exclusion causes economic exclusion, economic exclusion reinforces cultural exclusion at the same time. In fact, the most painful part of being culturally excluded is to know that it is unbreakable. During the fieldwork, I repeatedly heard the word “no choice” and “what can we do?” The sorrow of their suffering and the feeling of hopeless for any change are overtly expressed. Almost all interviewees knew that lack of cultural capital was the main cause of their marginal situation. They were neither good at any common language of the host society nor obtained any specific practical skills. Although some of them did acquire some cultural capitals eventually from experience, those are neither good quality nor enough for usage. Likewise, many interviewees expressed the wish of learning the language in some formal courses. However, few of them had the time to manage it even they had the chances. Some NGOs did organize some Cantonese courses for them, but the attendance was very low.

*We worked with NGOs before. We provided the Cantonese course for Nepalese. However, the enrollment was very low...that program was based upon their request. They asked us to conduct some language classes. But when we did it, their response was unexpectedly low. (Liyen, executive officer of HAB)*

Apart from their wish of joining formal course, few interviewees took any formal courses as mentioned earlier. Arun signed up a Cantonese course from FEONA once, but he “did not attend the class. Myself, because of the workload, I

*did not go.”* Interviewees repeatedly indicated that they were busy at work. Instead of suggesting difficulties in learning Cantonese, Yogan pointed out that the limitation of most working Nepalese facing in learning Cantonese formally was no time to learn.

*Any language learning is hard. But if you come to situation and time, you need it...you learn the Cantonese. Suppose any organization supply us to learn the Cantonese, but most Nepalese are in work. They used to go in six o'clock, they used to come at 9 o'clock. How can they have the time? (Yogan)*

They are being dominated by their work. Under the condition of long working hours, it is extremely difficult for them to join the language course. Pawan agreed with Yogan. For him, domination of work was the main constraint for learning spoken Cantonese. And due to the lack of language ability, they have to take up those 4D works as I analyzed in Chapter Four. It is a vicious cycle.

*They don't have time to learn this thing...They just morning to evening work to home, work to home. So who is going to teach them...Nobody is going to teach them. And they don't have to learn this thing also. So this is very difficult. So...like this style is going on. (Pawan)*

Unfixed timetable is also another essential factor for not joining those regular courses. Sarmila was a waitress who worked in a weekly schedule for the last five years. She could not manage any time to learn Cantonese in formal institution although she desperately wanted to do that. Instead, she could only learn it by herself through tapes and books in her leisure time.

*I try to learn to that, but it is very, very, very hard. Because you know, working in the restaurant is very busy...Sometimes, you need to do in the morning, sometimes, you need to work in the evening. So sometimes even you want to learn something, you don't have fix time. You cannot join the class...So that time, I just try to learn by book and tape. But it is very hard. (Sarmila)*

Job domination is not only limiting the chance of the Nepalese to improve their language ability, but also restricting their opportunity to equip more skills for adding value in order to advance their career and to improve their economic condition. In



other words, economic exclusion has made the cultural exclusion be more difficult to overcome. Keshab had been interested in taking some training courses, especially for the computer skill or mechanical subjects, for long. As working in construction, he needed to work about ten hours per day and six days per week. Besides, there were often some unexpected overtime arrangements. He did not have time to sign up any of these formal regular courses at all.

*If I have time, I like to try, but I don't have time. And also when you have time, their time is not suitable, you know. So it is difficult. We only have evening time and also after eight, nine. But they already close. (Keshab)*

Nevertheless, not everyone is being that much dominated by his or her work. Construction and catering industry perhaps are the most dominated work as the working hour is long, unfixed and few holidays. Still, there are some exceptional cases. Laxmi worked in restaurant but her timetable was relatively stable. Even though she worked on shift, she managed to sign up for a hotel management course in VTC. She could ask her manager to re-arrange her working timetable. Bhabin and Bindiya were minority who were able to take the courses in VTC. Their work allowed them to have more leisure time in order to develop extra skills. The former took the course arranged by the company. The latter had fixed working timetable and got off from the work as early as those working in office.

*It is part-time course only, for the evening time. From 6:30p.m. to 9:30p.m. Three hours only, twice a week. So after office I have much more time, nothing to do...So better I can use some time to go there. So I take course. (Bindiya)*

What's more, there is an interesting finding that working field somehow discourages some of them from acquiring extra cultural capital. For instance, some fields did not require as much Cantonese as other fields, the Cantonese level of those employees were relatively lower than other fields. While the usage of Cantonese in working is minimized, the eagerness to acquire the knowledge equally decreases. That's why Sarmila, a former waitress, did not realize the importance

of spoken Cantonese until she needed to find other job recently. Trilok's view on learning Cantonese is also testimony to this point. Trilok ran restaurant business. After spending 24 years in Hong Kong, he concluded his Cantonese standard as "*I can speak some*". To defense his rather low level of Cantonese, other than assistance from his Chinese wife, he further argued that fluent spoken Cantonese was unnecessary to his work.

*You know the type of business I do, it is not necessary to speak Cantonese you know...in restaurant, doesn't matter if you can't speak Cantonese. The people, who come to this kind of restaurant, the Asian and Indian restaurant, those people they know English already, you know. They are quite good in English... (Trilok)*

This finding is supported by emphasizing the importance of colleagues' role in learning Cantonese. Many interviewees commented that ability of spoken language was a matter of practice. In fact, it is also a matter of necessity of using this knowledge in work. Bindiya, for example, worked as an administrative officer in German company. She only used English in her work. In the interview, she did not show much anxiety about her marginal level of spoken Cantonese. On the other hand, Lalit felt uneasy because of his poor Cantonese. He blamed that was the result of lack of practices in his work.

*Mostly I work in Nepalese community and English...I never work together only Chinese. So if I work some Chinese company...maybe I will catch up (Cantonese). (Lalit)*

However, even they have the chance to learn and practice it in work, most words they learnt and used are basically commands and orders because of the hierarchal position in work. Like I proposed to use Cantonese for interview when I knew that Ambar could speak Cantonese, he rejected it immediately.

*I can't talk to you in Cantonese now. I just can talk for work, not for other things. Just like 快D啦! (Be quick.) 做埋先啦! (Finish this first.) 收埋先啦! (Keep this first.) like that...I just can talk for the work. (Ambar)*

What's worse, they are often in position of receiving orders. Besides, it is one-way communication in most of the time. In other words, those words they



learnt from work are probably inapplicable in other situations like their daily social interaction with neighbours. Those words could neither facilitate them much in work nor assist them to assimilate with the locals in daily life.

*With Chinese people we can talk only commanding words, like you come here, you do this first, you do this very fast. Commanding words like this we communicate with Chinese people. (Yogan)*

Cultural exclusion reinforces the economic exclusion and vice versa. Facing the severe economic exclusion, the Nepalese have alerted the need of acquiring cultural capital, particularly host language and practical skills. However, being lack of cultural capital, their works are characterized by 4D, which dominate nearly all of their time and limit their opportunities of signing up formal training courses. The cultural capital becomes further inaccessible. Hence, most interviewees hardly make any improvement and remain at the same level of standard both in language and skill application despite their years of living in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the economic condition changes rapidly and requires more from them, they become extremely invulnerable at responding the change.

## **5.2 Cultural Exclusion - Civil Exclusion**

As far as this thesis concerns, civil exclusion refers to the civil relationship between the Nepalese and the locals. Since relationship is largely built and maintained by communication, the usage of communicative tool, i.e. language application, influences on the quality of relationship. In this part, I will analyze the implication of cultural exclusion enhancing civil exclusion and vice versa. For the dynamics between cultural exclusion and civil exclusion, the worst case is cultural barrier arising discrimination, i.e. the excessive form of civil exclusion. The linkage between cultural exclusion and civil exclusion can be summarized by Lekha's words.

*Mostly, the new communities have problems with the language, different languages and different social, cultural, and different background...it is obstacle to integration to Hong Kong. (Lekha)*

### 5.2.1 “We don’t understand each other.” – Tension of Communication

Chapter Four illustrated various discriminations against the Nepalese in different social occasions. Some interviewees even mentioned that they felt like being treated as second-class citizens. Meanwhile, most interviewees also could point out that they felt being mistreated specially when they misunderstood or could not have effective communication with the locals.

*We know, doctor can speak good English. But when we go there, we can want to check very nice. Only watch and say you can go. They did not ask anything, what happen? What do you happen? Where is the pain? ...just only for validity...It is my experience. This is the discrimination. (Lalit)*

What’s more, civil exclusion includes the relationship with the locals in working place, neighbourhood and daily life. The Nepalese are being excluded from the local social circle. They, to large extent, are distant friends of the locals. Although some of them have friendly relationship, they seldom build close friendship or any types of intimate relationship with the locals. As Surya put it as “of course someone, they are also nice. But only the problem is communication. Because we don’t understand each other”. Lalit worked in the same company over a year. He could speak fairly few Cantonese, which he learned from work mainly. Among few Nepalese, he had a fine relationship with local colleagues. However, their relationship could never be deepened because of the communication barrier. Neither side was equipped with good communication medium.

Language is a must for the Nepalese to fully integrate into the host society. However, their daily experiences show that there is a cultural barrier which obstructs the Nepalese to enjoy some civil privileges especially those activities demand more on communication, such as public medical service. Despite being discriminated in some cases, failure in communication also pushes the Nepalese to seek for help from expensive private medical care. As a result, they lost the economic and civil benefit. After all, the private medical care is much more expensive than public medical service which is provided and sponsored by



government. For instance, Karna's daughter was sick when I interviewed him. He told me that he had taken her to see the private doctor before.

*Q: did you take her to the hospital?*

*Karna: yes. I take the doctor.*

*Q: is the public doctor or...*

*Karna: private?*

*Q: private doctor. Is it expensive?*

*Karna: yes. Expensive. It is the language. Easy to talk. Easy language.*

Apart from that, daily social life is also being affected significantly because of the language disadvantage. For instance, most Nepalese rent house in Hong Kong. Hence, landlords should be the one who has most frequent contact with them. They are supposed to keep a good relationship with their landlords. However, it is not like that in the reality. Living in Hong Kong for six and a half years, Bhabin moved three times. He stated that his relationship with his pervious landlords was not as good as expected due to the language problem.

*Until now I didn't get any nice speak English landlord. That's why, I got problem with landlord...Because when I get communication, I must go to the agency. I talk to the agency, they talk to them. And they talk to the agency, they talk me. That's problem. (Bhabin)*

Meanwhile, tension of communication can also be found in working place. Not everyone is as lucky as Lalit who can maintain a nice relationship with colleagues without good communication. Like Suresh indicated that the poor communication in fact arose tensions between the locals and the Nepalese, especially in working place where hierarchical relations existed. In his case, ineffective communication stains the relationship.

*Q: so is there anything you dislike about your job?*

*Suresh: yes, someone is shouting.*

*Q: shouting? Who is shouting at you?*

*Suresh: actually, I, sometimes my supreme, that means supervisor, they tell something, they speak something in Cantonese, I am not understand. That is it.*

Here I further argue that language, as a cultural capital, is not only be the obstacle that keeps the Nepalese detach from local, but also the mechanism of

arising the tension between the locals and the ethnic minority, i.e. the Nepalese in this thesis. And the accumulation of tension results in civil exclusion as well as detachment from host community.

### 5.2.2 “We can’t speak Cantonese...many things problem.” – Social Boundary

Cultural barrier, particularly language, also blocks the Nepalese to enjoy daily life smoothly in Hong Kong. Mira shared the difficulties in daily life because she could not speak good Cantonese. She pointed out a critical point that it was difficult to access public service or settle in host society without communication with local people. For instance, if they could not speak Cantonese properly, they would have problem to ask for help if they got lost on the street.

*We cannot speak the Cantonese, then very trouble sometimes. Many things very problem, like if I cannot go to Yuen Long from Kam Tin, then how can I ask from people...if I learning the Cantonese, if we know the some Cantonese, then easy, easy for us. (Mira)*

Language ability does draw the boundary of social activity areas. I asked interviewees to share their experience of going to Chinese restaurant and shopping in Chinese shop. Most interviewees seldom went to Chinese restaurant except they were with some Chinese friends. For instance, Bindiya and SaLaxmi only went there with Chinese colleagues but not family. That is because they “*don’t know how to tell the (she paused for one second) waiter. Don’t know how to order (SaLaxmi)*”. In some cases, like Upendra who often went to Chinese restaurant, he could only order certain foods because “*simple words I can order. And then other things I don’t really speak*”. Meanwhile, all interviewees did shop in Chinese shop. However, it was often that they went to shops which they were familiar with the shopkeeper or the shopkeeper could understand simple English. Even so, they often missed the special offer, such as seasoning sales, in the shops. Again, it was because of the language barrier.

*You know, like yesterday, we don’t know the discount thing...If we want to buy something, we go in the shop and see the price. If we can buy, we buy, if not, we go. No one tell us about the discount.*



*Because of the language problem. You know, we don't ask. People don't tell even they can speak English. (Keshab, Fieldnotes 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2001)*

Amrit even told me that he preferred to go to some Chinese shops which the shopkeeper could speak Nepali. Like many others, language is Amrit's main criterion of choosing interaction field. These examples clearly show how language restricts their social activities areas.

*Q: so you choose some shops that the owners can speak Nepalese?*  
*Amrit: yes, it is more comfortable for us, you know. Convenient for us to communicate. So we can talk more. Sometimes, if the price is high, so we can just bargain. Because we can talk in Nepali.*

Unfamiliar with the local environment also provokes the fear, which further limits the engagement of interaction field. Most Nepalese did not have much knowledge about the host community before they immigrated to Hong Kong. This is usually seen in the newly arrived migrants. Renuka recalled her early feeling of going out when she just arrived Hong Kong.

*At the beginning, I was so afraid, no matter where I go, I was afraid. But now I know a little bit Cantonese, I am not afraid anymore. (Renuka)*

Later, ability of spoken Cantonese eventually helped Renuka to erase the fear of unfamiliarity. She stated *"Now is better. It is good here."* Her case shows the importance of acquiring cultural capital in settling to the host community and enhancing civil inclusion.

### 5.2.3 *"They are not willing to speak English."* – Retreat

Interaction needs effort from both sides. I have explained that most Nepalese speak English better than Cantonese. Thus English is often served as the major language that the Nepalese use to communicate with the locals. However, despite the fact that English has been highly promoted by government throughout years, the English standard of Hong Kong people remains generally low. Although many Nepalese realized that their English was not good, some of them accused the

reluctances of the Chinese in using English to communicate with them.

*We cannot speak Cantonese, so the English can, we can speak, here the local Chinese can speak also, but also quite hard. Because they are not willing to speak English. (Bindiya)*

The reluctance of the locals in communication frustrates and deters the Nepalese from interaction with the locals. As the experience of frustration accumulates to certain level, it finally turns to be the negative feeling towards the locals and thus results them to retreat from communication or interaction with the locals. That is how the civil exclusion formulates.

*Everything is nice here...we can't speak Chinese...they really don't want to communicate you know. Even we try to explain, but they can't understand, and even three times, I keep repeat and repeat, even they still can't understand... what do you mean? They can't understand properly really. (Kopila, with an annoying facial expression while she speaks)*

That is more obvious in the working environment. When the Nepalese were the minority in the working team, they were “forced” to use the dominant language, i.e. Cantonese mostly. That was because they had to work and cooperate with other colleagues. As communication is unavoidable, their Chinese colleagues are compulsory to communicate with them. However, when there was more than one Nepalese working in the team, the model of cooperation and communication changes totally.

*Before I was working in Yuen Long, only I was Nepalese working there with all Chinese...they cooperate and they help if I have any problem. When I switched to Tin Shui Wai site, there were many Nepalese, when I ask for help, you ask your friends. (Yogan)*

The Chinese colleagues would then avoid communication with the Nepalese because of the communication difficulties since both parties perhaps are not good at either English or Chinese. It demands patience and time to make progress in their communication. That explains their distant relationship. On the one hand, the English standard of the Nepalese generally may not high enough, the following situation often occurs: “the immigration department officer ask something, but they



*are giving something else"*(Bindiya). On the other hand, the English standard of the locals is also not good. Camala indicted the low English standards of the locals. After living in Jordan and Yuen Long, Camala even noted the different standard of the locals' English in these two districts. Her observation is basically derived from her daily life experience.

*And in Hong Kong, specially in Yuen Long, there is very, very, very important to speak Cantonese...English works in Kowloon, but not in Yuen Long. There is nothing, nobody understand...In New Territories areas, I gain experience like that. But English no work, only Cantonese here. (Camala)*

Like many Nepalese, Camala lived in Yuen Long where she regarded as a Cantonese dominated area. She could not speak much Cantonese. The difficulties for her to live in a Cantonese dominated area, i.e. Yuen Long are imaginable. Her previous experience in Jordan sharpened her sensitivity towards the language problem in Yuen Long. She argued that *"in Yuen Long, they don't know, they don't know single English"*. After all, Jordan is a more developed multiple ethnicities area than Yuen Long. The unavoidable interaction with the locals resulted much frustration and discontent to her.

In Cantonese dominated areas, the tension of communication between the locals and the Nepalese are easily found. It causes much frustration. And the frustration of communication with the locals imposes some negative meanings to living in Hong Kong. Udeep remarked that his life in Hong Kong was sometimes *"boring"* due to miscommunication with the Chinese people.

*Q: so what do you think about your life in Hong Kong?*

*Udeep: sometimes, no understand, some people don't understand English, some Chinese, so this time, like boring.*

*Q: like what?*

*Udeep: feel boring, right? Because no understand Chinese, me, some people no understand English, right? This time is boring.*

As suffering so much from the communication problem with the locals, unsurprisingly the Nepalese affiliate closely with people from the same origin.

Thus, there is concentration of the Nepalese population in several notable districts, such as Jordan, Wan Chai and Kam Tin etc. Many interviewees expressed their preferences of living closely with their friends or relatives. In other words, the civil exclusion enhances inclusion of the native community. Nevertheless, the more they “retreat” from the host society, the more they are being excluded. Taking learning Cantonese as an example, the fastest way of learning is to practice it with the locals in daily life. However, in the cases of civil exclusion, they do not have much chance to do so. That is how cultural capitals become inaccessible. In the extreme case, they do not feel the need of doing so. In that case, they are totally excluded from civil life.

The same logic can apply to acquiring practical skill. Distant relationship with the locals bounds their sources of the training information in the host society. As the Nepalese are new arrivals to the host society, they are unfamiliar with the public services, such as governmental training courses. They need help from the locals. However, they are distant from the locals. Therefore, their chance of being trained is reduced. In fact, unfamiliar with the communal resources reflects their detachment from host society, i.e. civil exclusion.

### **5.3 Cultural Exclusion - Political Exclusion**

The dynamics between cultural exclusion and political exclusion are mainly expressed by the mismatch of demand (needs of the Nepalese community) and supply (responses from the host government). It is a chicken and egg question if we asked whether demand or supply appeared first. Here I suggest the problem despite the sequence of their appearance. Being perceived as invisible citizens, the needs of the Nepalese community had not been answered until the recent years. While the government has contributed large amount of budget on the new arrivals from the Mainland China, other ethnic minorities barely attract its attention and share only a handful budget. The Nepalese are excluded from the population



census and suffer political ignorance. When there is a big demand of schooling among the Nepalese children, government education system and polices cannot meet their need. In fact, that is largely because government fails to notify their needs at the first place. In other words, government does not prepare anything for them. As Ekraj said, *"They don't do any different to our being. Nothing else."*

For the most important cultural capitals, i.e. language and skill, Hong Kong government also does not provide any institution to assist them when they first arrive. In the past, only NGOs and Nepalese organizations had launched Cantonese classes for the Nepalese community. On the contrary, government took a passive role and only financially assisted some NGOs to launch those courses. Examples of inadequate number of English training courses, sending Chinese information to ethnic organizations and so on are evidences that political exclusion has malign impact on cultural exclusion. The unhelpful government policies force the Nepalese community to stand on their own foot. The cultural capital is even more unreachable to them.

Because of the lack of cultural capital, particularly language, the Nepalese are unable to access many of public services as nearly all of the service is prepared for Cantonese speakers mainly, such as the training courses in VTC. Their limited knowledge of the host society has restricted their paces of seeking help from various government departments such as the job-hunting service in labour department and the school advices from education department. Because of few approaches to those departments, their needs are seldom heard and thus cannot be answered.

Obviously, there is a vicious dynamic between cultural and political exclusion. Due to political exclusion, the Nepalese are being treated as invisible citizens. Their needs have been ignored and neglected. Although government seems to be realized their existence and pays more attention to the community recently, its response remains few and clearly inadequate. Unfriendly and unhelpful policies still exist. Referring to cultural exclusion, the existing policies obstruct them from

combating the exclusion. The Nepalese have difficulties to make their voice being heard because of cultural exclusion. After all, they are unfamiliar with the host society while they are lack of communicative language. As a result, in short, political and cultural exclusion strengthens and pushes each other to reach their extreme.

#### **5.4 Economic Exclusion - Civil Exclusion**

*Second-class citizens* and *distant friends* can represent the civil exclusion against the Nepalese. Apart from cases of discrimination reflecting the treatment as second-class citizens, the Nepalese actually are not being totally excluded from civil society since many of them still maintain contact with the locals. However, these relationships are distant. They seldom have close relationship with the locals. Based upon my research, I argue types of civil exclusion are related to the economic exclusion against the Nepalese. Economic exclusion extensively shapes the type of civil exclusion against the Nepalese and vice versa.

According to respondents, economic exclusion significantly harms their civil relationship with the locals at least in two ways. One of the typical economic exclusion is to participate in demanding work. As their work is extremely demanding, their life is certainly *"very busy, always working, everyday is working."*(Gatary) They seldom have time to establish social relationship with others. When I asked Yogan about his leisure life, he answered that his daily life was *"just like the machine"* and he did not have any leisure activities *"because we don't have time."* Sankar expressed that he even did not have chance to communicate with his wife because of work. Their economic activity explicitly erodes their relationship with others.

*Even my wife with me, she has the night duty, I have my job in day duty. We cannot meet, we cannot meet to, we cannot see to each other. Very hard. (Sankar)*

Furthermore, the Nepalese not only have no time after work, but also have no



time during their work. Many interviewees mentioned that their work was extremely busy. They barely had time to make friends with their colleagues during the working hour. Working in a restaurant locating at tourist spot, Surya even described his work was like “12 hours running, running” so he did not have time to stop, even just for taking meal. He surely did not have time to communicate with colleagues as well. Similar stories happen in other fields. Even they have the chance to meet up with the locals, they do not have the time to get to know each other and establish friendship. Therefore, most of them maintain distant relationship with colleagues despite their long working hour.

*I think very few people we want to, very few people I work, we want to talk. All of us are very busy, we don't have so close. (Yogan)*

Besides, many Nepalese suffer either underemployment or unemployment. Their working experiences are largely constructed by short-term works. As a result, it is hard for them to build up long-term and stable relationship with colleagues. Their employment may end before they get to know their colleagues. Particularly, this frequently happens to construction workers since construction works are mostly project basis. Often, workers do not meet each other again after the project finishes. In other words, their “friendship” with colleagues is also project basis. What’s more, the long-term unemployment can even break down the social tie of the unemployed and the host society (Sen 2000; Lea 1997; Gore 1995; Levitas, 1998). Work is the only venue where they meet up the locals. Being unemployed means being isolated from the society.

As I mentioned in the analysis of devalued job nature, the temporary working experience has generated the feeling of being unwanted among workers. This feeling arises the sense of being excluded as well as detachment. Actually, the economic exclusion influences the Nepalese’s civil involvement by ruining their plan of long term staying. Many interviewees were hesitated to plan their future life in Hong Kong. Like Sankar mentioned that “my experience, the retire life is

very hard to be here”, their past experiences of economic exclusion have posed much worries on them. Consequently, most interviewees stated the will of return to Nepal in the future. In this case, how would they be actively involved in the civil life when they are more like sojourners rather than settlers?

*In Hong Kong, if you work, you can get the money, can expense yourself. So if no money, not working, how to survive? So in my country, you can survive even you have small money, even you have own farm, own house...So if I cannot work in Hong Kong, so it is no way to stay. (Surya)*

Furthermore, their tiny income also affects their social life. Income is the means of satisfying individual basic needs and a necessary passport to almost all forms of social interaction. As I mentioned previously, their income can only satisfy their basic life. They barely have extra money for entertainment or social gathering with friends. Accordingly, it is very difficult for them to maintain friendship with others when they hardly have any social life at all.

*Some money, and my family here. How to afford this, the house rent, the water, the electricity. Security, my salary just \$7500. I live in Kam Tin, that time. One flat is \$3000 also including electricity, water, everything. And then eating, enjoying with friends, so \$7500 is very little. (Diwash)*

Secondly, their living area reflects their economic standard and influences their civil relationship as well. In the analysis of economic exclusion, I have mentioned that their choice of accommodation is largely affected by their income since housing rent is various from place to place. Villages in Kam Tin are cheap to live in but far from the urban center. However, being suffered from serious economic disadvantage, many Nepalese have no choice but live in those physically excluded regions. Civil exclusion against them is caused not only by lack of personal resources but also by insufficient or unsatisfactory spatial facilities, such as poor public transport networks, remotely sited shops and so on.

*I want to Wan Chai, but no good, no money. Here is like a village...and people in the Wan Chai, Central, is like a city, a developed city...many lights, like a center. But here is same Nepal, same Nepal. (Machhindra)*



Moreover, spatiality is a source of livelihood and also social integration in a broader sense (Madanipour 1998; Sibley 1996). It has a major role in the integration or segregation of urban society. It is a manifestation of social relationship while affecting and shaping the geometries of these relationships (Paugam 1995). As the Nepalese population is highly concentrated at those areas, they actually live in a Nepalese neighbourhood. Many respondents described those places as villages in Nepal, *“it is just like in Nepal”* (Bindiya). That is not only because of the environment, but also due to people living in the neighbourhood. Machhindra stated his neighbourhood as *“all are Nepalese you see here”*. That elucidates their distant civil relationship with local people.

On the contrary, civil exclusion does not have much vivid influences on economic exclusion. Civil relationship can be seemed as social capital that advances the Nepalese in economic activities. Being civil excluded is equal to lacking the social capital to assist the economic development. This is the same logic as dynamics between civil exclusion and cultural exclusion.

In sum, economic exclusion strengthens civil exclusion much. It is apparently showed by the demanding work resulting limited time and limited chance of establishing relationship with others. Economic exclusion actually obstructs civil relationship and causes civil exclusion. In return, civil exclusion also impedes economic advantages by limiting the sources of improvement. Both exclusions sustain each other.

## **5.5 Economic Exclusion - Political Exclusion**

In 5.1 and 5.3 showed the vicious cycle between cultural, economic and political exclusion respectively. The focus was on the interrelationship between two latter exclusions and cultural exclusion. At the same time, the dynamic between economic exclusion and political exclusion is also implicitly showed. In this section, the emphasis is to show the direct relationship between economic

exclusion and political exclusion. I argue that both of them also consist harmful influences towards each other.

Due to political exclusion, the Nepalese face the problem of obtaining cultural capitals and thus leads to economic exclusion. The dynamics between economic exclusion and political exclusion are apparently showed. Besides, more direct political influence on the Nepalese economic exclusion shows in the economic and labour policies. As Hong Kong's government follows the philosophy of *lassie-faire* in the economic realm, there is no policy actively protect workers' right from exploitation, particularly on wage. Unlike other western countries, Hong Kong does not have any regulation about the minimum wage. Hence, labour's wage floats with the economic trend. That is why many Nepalese working for longer hour but earning diminutive income. While the Nepalese are lack of cultural capital to protect themselves from economic exploitation, the political exclusion worsens their situation by making "invisible" their pathetic economic condition. In fact, many NGOs requested government for legislation in the minimum wage regulation as soon as possible. Workers have serve problem of polarization especially during economic downward in recent years. However, government does not agree with the need of legislation. It insists on the advantage of *lassie-faire* policy for our economic development. Under this political philosophy, the Nepalese inevitably become the scapegoat of economic development and continuously suffer the economic exclusion from 4D works.

Meanwhile, economic exclusion arises political exclusion against the Nepalese as well. As a matter of fact, demanding economic activities influences their life in Hong Kong greatly, including their political involvement. Most of their working hours is extremely long, various from ten to fourteen hours per days. Like Udeep described his life in Hong Kong, "*only go to work and then come back, like this. Hm...and get rest in the holiday time.*" They do not have much time for other activities, needless to mention spending time on political activities which are



considerably time consuming. For them, life is simply occupied by work. Imagine when a worker was exhausted from work, even he had the good wills to do something for the community, he did not have time and energy. Consequently, the participation rate of the Nepalese organizations is low and so does affect the power and effectiveness of their political petition to government. Furthermore, the economic exclusion against the Nepalese individuals results in poverty of the community as a whole. Indeed, poverty is a cause of the internal diversity of the Nepalese community. First, poverty means limited resource. The growth of community needs resources. The Nepalese community is lack of financial resource in order to develop. Second, it intensifies the competition of both internal and external resources between organizations, and thus harms internal cohesion. I will explain how the economic exclusion affects the political exclusion more in the succeeding chapter.

To sum up, although few interviewees mentioned the linkage between economic exclusion and political exclusion, the dynamics between these two exclusions are obviously showed in analysis. Hong Kong's economic policies have largely ignored the fact of exploitation against disadvantaged groups, e.g. the Nepalese community in this study. Our government fails to provide a safety net to assist and to protect economically excluded people. Ignorance, in nature, is exclusion. Being excluded from government protection, economic exclusion against the Nepalese is weighted up. And it is harder for the Nepalese to fight against it. On the other hand, the economic exclusion, particularly the demanding work, dominates their life. They do not have surplus time for non-economic activities. In spite of all, they have to depend on economic activities for survival. Due to low participating rate in political activities, the Nepalese community can hardly organize and make their stance being heard. That also explains their "invisibility" in the past years. As a result, political exclusion and economic exclusion are overlapping and harmful to each other.



## 5.6 Political Exclusion - Civil Exclusion

Political exclusion, in fact, affects every aspect of life. I have discussed the impact of political exclusion on cultural and economic exclusion previously. Here comes to the final one, civil exclusion. In this section, I will spotlight the influences of political exclusion in the generation of civil exclusion, particularly on discrimination against the Nepalese. Furthermore, I will also present the civil exclusion as a mechanism to arise additional political exclusion.

The extreme form of political exclusion is invisible to the needs of an ethnic community. While ethnic organization has complained the discrimination against them for years, the government still hesitates to legalize against discrimination law. Actually, the government has pursued rather soft policies to combat the discrimination throughout the years, including educational and promotional measures. This strategy is based upon the result of the consultation on racial discrimination in late 1996<sup>83</sup>. Meanwhile, the Equal Opportunities (Race) Bill<sup>84</sup> was debated and rejected on 27 June, 1997. Since then, there is no legislative discussion in this area. HAB has conducted another consultation referring against race discrimination in June, 2001. However, it still has not reached any conclusion after one year. According to the minutes of Legislative Council on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2002, HAB explained that they divided the consultation into two parts. For the first part, they consulted the business sector and from where they received twenty-five replies including sixteen for the legislation. That is the majority view of the sector. For the second part, they consulted fifty-five organizations including NGOs and ethnic associations. Almost all of them agreed the need of legislation. However, HAB is still analyzing different opinions and does not reach conclusion until now.

It is undeniable that discrimination exists in our society as I have showed

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<sup>83</sup> *Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under Article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, p.vi.*

<sup>84</sup> The Bill sought to make it unlawful to discriminate against a person on the ground of race in the areas of work, accommodation, education, the provision of goods, facilities and services, the administration of laws and government programmes and the activities of clubs.



several excessive cases in the discussion of civil exclusion. It is really unreasonable for the government to excuse from processing legislation against discrimination. In fact, our government has noticed the need of ethnic groups quite late and thus the legislative or administrative work also started late (within this six years). Before that, the government policies totally excluded the ethnic minorities from the political agenda. Everything is just the beginning now. However, the repeated occurrence of discrimination against ethnic minorities also indicates the inadequate public education on equal opportunities and race harmony. Trying to ignore the need is indeed discrimination in nature. In other words, our government encourages discrimination indirectly. And discrimination arises and results civil exclusion. It is explicit that political exclusion would strengthen the civil exclusion.

Besides, the political exclusion enhances civil exclusion because of the uncertain future of the community in Hong Kong. Since government ignored multiple exclusions against the Nepalese in the past years, the Nepalese consequently have low expectation for changes in the future. In fact, many interviewees expressed their discontent about the life in Hong Kong and uncertainty about the government policies towards them. Therefore, many of them planned to return homeland in the future. Their plan straightly tells their temporary staying in Hong Kong. This indeed is an excuse for them to be detached from the civil society. They are not going to stay here long anyway. The need of being involved in civil life in order to develop and establish relationship with host society is obviously unnecessary. Thus, they withdraw from the civil life and results in civil exclusion.

At the same time, civil exclusion also fortifies the political exclusion. The most obvious example is being silent in political petition. Due to the civil exclusion, daily experiences discourage the Nepalese to further pursue their political rights. After all, their needs may not be answered anyway. What's more, their

relationship with host society is also damaged because of the civil exclusion. It is difficult to build up the trust and integrate into the host society. Most of the time, they prefer keeping silent and struggling by their own efforts to depend on the government. That is what Pawan told me about his views on the locals. He did not trust the locals and never rely on government.

*Someone even just give us the lie...Because we don't know nothing, nobody, know nothing...They don't want to help us also. Why do they want to help us?...We don't have relation with him, with them. They don't take care us. That's why very struggle. We must struggle. (Pawan)*

On the one hand, this type of attitude has worsened their civil exclusion. Generally, they only keep distant friendship with the locals. Slowly, they are not willing to keep contact with the locals when their negative experiences accumulate to certain level. They are further civil excluded. The negative experience will repeat again until the government takes a more aggressive stance in promoting the social cohesion. On the other hand, the further civil exclusion has turned the community more distant from the involvement of host community, including the political participation. That gives excuse for being political invisible. The rationale of political exclusion against them is being supported in that case. That is how the civil exclusion enhancing political exclusion. In short, political and civil exclusion actively interact and reinforce each other.

All in all, Rodger (1995) mentions one key feature of social exclusion is focusing more on process instead of static situation. Following his idea, this section has studied the dynamics between different modes of exclusions in order to portray the process of social exclusion in Hong Kong. It is a vicious cycle between cultural, civil, political and economic exclusion. The malign dynamics between exclusions worsen the situation of the Nepalese community. First, the cultural exclusion becomes more serious as the cultural capital is more inaccessible. It is due to economic exclusion which is dominating their life. It is also the result of unfriendly policies because of their political invisibility as well as lack of resources



because of civil exclusion. Second, the Nepalese cannot escape from the 4D work (economic exclusion) as they are lack of language and skill (cultural exclusion). Meanwhile, lack of political attention and the non-intervention economic policy (political exclusion) neglects their disadvantages and leaves them to the economic exploitation. Civil exclusion limits their sources of economic improvement. That explains the unbreakable economic exclusion against them. Thirdly, the Nepalese are being treated as second-class citizens and distant friends (civil exclusion) largely due to the language barrier (cultural exclusion). They cannot communicate effectively with the locals. At the same time, due to the economic exclusion, they neither have time to spend with friends nor have extra money to enjoy the normal social life. What's more, their work limits their chance of knowing and making friends with the locals. Their meager income is only enough for them to live in an excluded life. They are further distant from civil society. As government ignores unfair treatments against them and reluctances to establish against discrimination law, the Nepalese are continuously to suffer the civil exclusion. Lastly, exclusions from economic, civil and cultural contribute on political exclusion as well. They cause the Nepalese becoming increasingly invisible to political agenda. Both economic and civil exclusion discourages the Nepalese to participate in political activities. The former exhausts and dominates their time to join the activities while the latter imposes negative feeling towards government policies. Consequently, the Nepalese do not have expectation on political changes and thus they do not bother to participate in it. Cultural exclusion blocks the Nepalese from having effective communication with the government. Because of low participating rate in political activities and few petitions being heard from the Nepalese community, political exclusion thus cannot be solved. This vicious suppresses them. That is why the grief of "no choice" has repeatedly mentioned by interviewees. Life is a loop for them.

In the discourse of social exclusion, scholars of monopoly approach have

argued a breakthrough can be brought by the assistance of government. In fact, some of the Nepalese have been worked hard to change their condition. They use their political rights to associate together and to communicate with the government. If their sufferings can be seen as discrepancies of their complete citizenship, seeking more protection from the government should be seen as a means to approach the citizenship fulfillment. This solution of social exclusion will be discussed in the next chapter.



## Chapter 6      Approaching Complete Citizenship

*I never know what is going on in the future. I tried to find out some books, may be it explains about it. But I never found it. (Surya)*

The monopoly approach believes that complete citizenship can mitigate the social exclusion (Silver 1995). This belief generates discussion on citizenship to response to the problem. One of the main arguments is the sequence of the complete citizenship. Marshall and Soyal present different ideas on this. Marshall's (1950) theory of formation of citizenship states that rights are gradually extended in stages to members of social entities that have previously been excluded from the polity, thus gradually transforming them into citizens. He argues that citizenship rights evolve sequentially: civil, then political and finally social. Civil rights are also the legal rights, such as the right of abode and rights of property. And the political rights include the right to vote, right of association and the right to participate in the central government organs. Lastly the social rights are expanded to include social entitlements, such as unemployment benefit and provision for health and education (Marshall 1950; Turner 1993). In Marshall's framework, the fulfillment of each right is a prerequisite for the next set of rights. What's more, political rights are needed to pursue and to secure social rights (Turner 1993; Soysal 1994). However, Soysal disagrees with him. Based upon studies of guestworkers in European countries, she revises Marshall's citizenship fulfillment sequence. She argues that social rights are gained earlier than political rights due to what she calls "postnational". It is a model of membership that emphasizes much on universal personhood rather than nationality. The growth of universal personal rights has reinforced the individual social rights before his political rights pursue.

Nevertheless, taking account of the process of the Nepalese citizenship fulfillment, Marshall's model is more appropriate to it. We have seen that the Nepalese are granted with civil and political rights in Hong Kong in previous chapters. It means that they have acquired two main elements of citizenship. Yet, their political rights have not been well adapted and applied. That is what I



illustrated in political exclusion against them. Also they are being excluded from social rights as their social sufferings are stated in previous chapters. Under the discourse of citizenship, their problem of political rights is unutilized rather than being prohibited. Sufferings from multiple exclusions including cultural, social and economic exclusion has awakened them the need of using their political rights to complete their citizenship as well as to secure their social and civil rights. The establishment of organization is answering this need. They cannot tolerate the ignorance of government anymore.

*The Hong Kong government already know the Nepalese community...when the declaration was made in 1984...so that we are expecting with government some administrative help the Nepalese community...not specific for the community arriving, how to integrate them, how to solve them problem, how to education provide for their children, there are no any options, no chance, no opportunities, but the government knows since 84...so we want to make the policy for this new community. We are asking for the government, what policy you are acting for this new community? (Lekha)*

The first Nepalese association, FEONA was established in 1993. It marked the beginning of the Nepalese influx as well. Aiming at helping the community to secure their welfare and status in Hong Kong, FEONA actively communicate with different government departments. It had about 1,000 members in 2000<sup>85</sup>. Since the establishment of FEONA, Nepalese associations are mushrooming in Hong Kong. There are frequent communication between the Nepalese associations and the government. Ekraj Rai was one of the active members in the community<sup>86</sup>. Being involved in various Nepalese social activities for so many years, he highlighted the official attention at the Nepalese community.

*We started to communicate since 1994 only for who were born in Hong Kong...the people came from Nepal from 1994 only, then heavily we came during 1997 only. That's why we are newly arrive, we are not adopted to that, not integrate to the whole society. So*

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<sup>85</sup> Lekha gave this number in the first interview, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2000.

<sup>86</sup> Ekraj Rai was the former chairman of Hong Kong Gurkha Forum and the committee of Rai Association. He was also a founding member of a Nepalese primary school, Poinsettia and was now working with his wife on their newly opened kindergarten in Yuen Long.



*that the immigration...the labour department has much interest at us. Sometimes they ask us to the Home Affair department, and they conduct the meeting, what problem you have, we community facing... they ask us, and we reply. And they take it very seriously. (Ekraj)*

According to him, the government paid much attention at the Nepalese community. The government was willing to communicate and to hear their needs indeed. However, it has not done enough. The Nepalese community is still quite unsatisfied about their citizen right after about a decade's communication. The Nepalese are still unsure about their future in Hong Kong. After all, the communication between the government and the Nepalese community, so far, do not make significant progress.

*I never know what is going on in the future. I tried to find out some books, may be it explains about it. But I never found it. I read the ordinance, government ordinance of the immigrant policy. But I have no idea. (Surya)*

The feeling of uncertain leads to the detachment from the host society, and hence further exclusion will be resulted. So what happened in the process of the Nepalese community approaching the complete citizenship? If Marshall is right, after they have been granted for a variety of political rights, what are the reasons that they still cannot secure their social rights? In this chapter I look at their difficulties in pursue citizenship fulfillment. The analysis of the question contains two aspects: organizational aspect and individual aspect. The historical development and changes of two most representative Nepalese associations, FEONA and Gurkha (Nepalese) Federation, Hong Kong (GNF) illustrate the process of communication between the Nepalese community and the Hong Kong government. Firstly, I lay out that the internal diversity within the Nepalese community has slow down its pace of citizenship fulfillment. Secondly, I pinpoint the specific problems concerning individual level in latter part of this chapter. The passive involvement among individuals is in fact the result of vicious cycle.

## 6.1 A Divided Community: From FEONA To GNF-*“All Nepalese should be united.”*

Shared interests are the main forces that pull an ethnic group together in the first place. The shared interests can be political or economic. In other words, when a group of people perceive themselves to share a common heritage and also have concrete economic or political reasons for affiliating with each other, they may begin to form an ethnic group. Then they need shared institutions to organize themselves to achieve their interests (Spickard and Burroughs 2000:8-9). In the case of the Nepalese community, combat social exclusion is their preliminary interest that pulling them together.

### 6.1.1 The Pioneer Association

Noticing the need of uniting in order to strengthen and to pursue the needs of the community, several Gurkha descendants and Nepalese businessmen established the first Nepalese association, FEONA in 1993. At the beginning, FEONA's meeting was held in Trilok's restaurant since FEONA did not have its own office that time. Trilok also remembered the purposes and objectives of FEONA at the beginning. For him, it was started as a social gathering club.

*Those days we are only few Nepalese here. Not so many people was here from the army side. People who were working in the restaurant must be the chef, and some managers working in the restaurant. We decided that we should have some kind of Nepali organization. Must be social type...Social organization for us, may be we can share our view, we can meet together, something like this. (Trilok)*

On the other hand, another founder, Shiva recalled the objectives of FEONA were not simply social gathering. Rather, it focused on protecting rights of the Nepalese workers in Hong Kong. For instance, they helped workers to strike for the proper salary and the right of sick leaves. In this context, FEONA carried a strong political aim when it was established.

*So we just, you know, try to talk to each other, very much like that...it is not for the politically, it is for protection for the workers here...so*



*specially we get to know the majority Nepalese. Our association help them. (Shiva)*

At first, the organization started with just few activists participating even though they might not have the same vision about the role of FEONA. The organization started and ran on its way. But things became more complicated when the association grew steadily, more and more people including some politicians involved in it. The homeland politics eventually had been brought in the association. That influenced and modeled the association's future. At first, someone suggested to make some donations and sent them back to Nepal. No one has ever doubted that was out of the good will of helping their home country to develop. So FEONA rose quite big amount of funding and contributed to its homeland. This good act was appreciated and since then the organization's name was well heard in Nepal. However, the dramatic change came after the democratic revolution took place in Nepal.

*In 1991, or may be 1992, the democracy came to Nepal. It changed the whole monopolization system...during that period, there was a period that the communist won the election and ruled the country for six months...They knew that there was FEONA in Hong Kong. Then they sent someone here and...the communist asked what FEONA needed, and that time, we needed a person, a leader to take over the office...so we didn't need to pay and they sent someone to here. That person, you know, he may or may not politician, the problem is he was sent by the communist, then he should be communist and belonged to the communist party. Since then, others accused us as the communism association. (Roshan)*

Being accused of having communist background, FEONA suffered a lot. The most significant effect is losing its members. Some of its former members even denied involvement in the past. It is obvious that people try to delineate themselves from politics. According to some informants, Trilok was one of the funding members of FEONA. He also mentioned that *"we are the one in the beginning to establish it"* in the interview. He also provided much assistance for the organization's operation, such as providing venue and refreshment for meetings at the first two or three years. However, he claimed that he was quite detached



from the organization. He stressed that he had not been an active member in FEONA from the very beginning. His worries of political concerns when involving in FEONA was clearly stated in his words.

*Before I also was not active. I only provided the refreshment for them. And I didn't want to be an active member there. My views and their views have some differences...most of the organizations have some kind of link in Nepal. And myself, I am very open, I don't want to be, I don't want to be related to any of parties.*  
(Trilok)

Trilok now involves in a recently established association, Nepalese Charitable Association. He stressed that his organization was clear from any political relations. Roshan does not actively involve in FEONA anymore as well because of the same reason. Although they are disconnected with FEONA, both of them establish and actively involve with other organizations now. That shows their belief of organizational power has not changed. Instead, their departure from FEONA shows the diversity within the community. At the meantime, there is an organization boom in the late-90s. It strongly evidences the internal diversity.

#### 6.1.2 Organization Boom

Along with the rapid increase of the Nepalese immigrants, the Nepalese associations have been mushrooming in the territories since the late-90s. That fits Shiva's description, "*slowly, slowly, they come out for their rights now.*" According to the Hong Kong Police Forces Association Registration Section, there were 22 registered Nepalese associations in Hong Kong up to April, 2002. As far as I heard, the actual number of existing organizations should be more than that since there are numerous of unregistered associations.

The former FEONA's coordinator, Lekha estimated the number of Nepalese association was about thirty in 2001. Meanwhile, there are different sources about the number of associations. Some said about twenty while some said close to fifty. The actual number of Nepalese associations is a myth. It is largely because the name of "association" is too easily given. I collected 38 associations' names



despite its actual operation. Considering the population of the Nepalese is only 12,000 to 50,000 in Hong Kong, this number of association is striking high.

When the number of associations has increased rapidly in the past decade, internal diversity becomes the nightmare of the Nepalese community. Firstly, it weakens their bargaining power in requesting more resources from the government. Their diversity results in difficulty of cooperation with each other. Thus, each group presents a different request to the government. The power of single association is limited. It certainly does not have much influence on making its view being listened. On the other hand, the diversity of the community also causes the confusion of responding from the government when there are too many different requests. Secondly, it arises conflicts and competitions among associations, i.e. community members. Both cause the slow development of the community. When I first approached Liyen Chen, the executive officer of HAB, and asked for the information about the Nepalese community. She pointed out that lack of representative association was the major problem in the Nepalese community. She suggested that the Nepalese community was the most diversified group among other ethnic groups. And that caused many administrative difficulties for HAB to collect and to organize their opinions.

*When we have meeting with them, they have so many representatives from different associations. Each of them represents different groups...Each of them requests different things from us. They even against each other in the meeting, saying like that group's opinion can't represent others. There is no consensus in the community. We don't know which opinion can represents the community, and what the community really wants and needs. (Liyen)*

Different bases of associations explicitly shows the internal diversity. From interviews, many interviewees observed the diversity in the community. They also suggested that organizations could be categorized according to their basis of solidarity. Caste and origin district are the most common note from interviewees' observation. However, the basis of Nepalese associations is more diversified than just having two categories. They can be classified into five categories: gender,

profession, origin, caste and neutral.

Table 6.1 Basis of solidarity among different associations

	Name of Association	Basis of solidarity
1	<i>Hong Kong Tamang Ghedung Association</i>	Caste
2	<i>Kirat Rai Association Hong Kong</i>	Caste
3	<i>Kirat Yakthung Chumlung Community Welfare Sub Committee Hong Kong</i>	Caste
4	<i>Magar Association Hong Kong</i>	Caste
5	<i>Tamu Association of Hong Kong</i>	Caste
6	<i>Federal Limbuwan Hong Kong</i>	Caste
7	<i>Limbuwan Bikash Parisad Hong Kong</i>	Caste
8	<i>Hong Kong Nepalese Women Association</i>	Gender
9	<i>HongKong Gurkhas Association</i>	Gurkhas
10	<i>British Gurkha Ex-servicemen Association Hong Kong</i>	Gurkhas
11	<i>Hong Kong Gurkhas Forum</i>	Gurkhas
12	<i>Ex-Gurkha Son and Daughter Association Hong Kong</i>	Gurkhas
13	<i>Hong Kong Nepalese Mutual Association</i>	Neutral
14	<i>Hong Kong Nepalese Social Club</i>	Neutral
15	<i>Far East Overseas Nepalese Association</i>	Neutral
16	<i>Himalayan Overseas Society Hong Kong SAR</i>	Neutral
17	<i>Gurkhas (Nepalese) Federation, Hong Kong</i>	Neutral
18	<i>Nepalese Alien Association Hong Kong</i>	Neutral
19	<i>Nepalese Literary Academy Hong Kong</i>	Neutral
20	<i>The Ethnic Nepalese Federation of Hong Kong</i>	Neutral
21	<i>United Society of Nepalese Unity Hong Kong</i>	Neutral
22	<i>Nepalese Charitable Association</i>	Neutral
23	<i>Dharan Hong Kong Forum</i>	Origin (District)
24	<i>Lamjung Service Society Lamjung Sewa Samittee</i>	Origin (District)
25	<i>Sankhuwasabha Society</i>	Origin (District)
26	<i>Shyangja Public Welfare Committee Hong Kong</i>	Origin (District)
27	<i>Taplejung Hong Kong Society, Hong Kong</i>	Origin (District)
28	<i>Chaubise Society Hong Kong</i>	Origin (Place)
29	<i>Baglung Society Hong Kong</i>	Origin (District)
30	<i>Kusumhu Society Hong Kong</i>	Origin (District)
31	<i>HongKong Terathum Forum</i>	Origin (District)
32	<i>Khotang Society Committee Hong Kong</i>	Origin (District)
33	<i>Lumbini Forum Hong Kong</i>	Origin (District)
34	<i>Morangeli Association Hong Kong</i>	Origin (District)
35	<i>Myagdi Society Hong Kong</i>	Origin (District)
36	<i>Pathibhara Society Hong Kong</i>	Origin (District)
37	<i>HongKong Construction Workers Union</i>	Profession
38	<i>Nepal Business Association (Hong Kong) Limited<sup>87</sup></i>	Profession

Source: Informant and Hong Kong Police Forces Association Registration Section.

Note: 1. Registered associations are in Italic.

<sup>87</sup> Nepal Business Association (Hong Kong) Limited is the only association I have often heard but it does not registered in the Hong Kong Police Forces Association Registered Section. Instead, it registered as a company.



The basis of solidarity implies the membership requirement of each association respectively. Membership is the mechanism of exclusion and inclusion within the association. For example, Tuma Association Hong Kong's target is at the Gurung caste. Other castes are prohibited from its membership. There are six associations based upon castes. In fact, the caste system is a distinctive practice in Nepal influenced by the Hindu culture. The system has a complicated historical background and multiple implications. But the system does not clearly exist in the Nepalese community here since the British army recruited only five major castes<sup>88</sup>. Here castes mean more like the surname rather than imply a hierarchy system. Meanwhile, there are eleven associations based upon place of origin including ten are based upon district and only one is based upon village. This is more diversified dimension. Actually, either caste or district of origin basis is more likely to reflect the difference of membership criteria rather than competition between associations. After all, each organization targets at different group of people.

It is important to note that there are four associations using identity of Gurkhas as their basis of solidarity. They are target at the same group of people. In terms of member recruitment, the competition between those groups is more intense. After all, member fee is the key financial source for the majority of associations. Moreover, these four associations reflect more on the generation matter. The former three associations are more concentrated in the "old-generation" who are ex-Gurkhas and the last one is target at their descendants who are so-called "the new generation". At the meantime, there is no specific criterion in joining those neutral basis associations. Their political stands are unclear and this will be explained in the later section. Only two associations are based upon the professionals. That tells the major occupation of the Nepalese as well as the groups which are more alert about their rights in Hong Kong.

The number and basis of solidarity of the associations gives us a solid instance

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<sup>88</sup> For details, please refer to Chapter 3.

of the internal diversity among the Nepalese. As targeting at the same population, its competition of resources is intensified because resources are scarce. In fact, members of the community also noted the internal diversity. Several informants mentioned their worries of the problem. The existing associations are simply saturated. Hence, it causes the competitions and conflicts among associations. Some interviewees stated that the conflicts between associations were much about their cultural background. According to them, the Nepalese actually extend their practice from homeland to the host society. Lalit blamed that was due to the Nepalese people could not change their mindset even though they immigrated to Hong Kong. From his point of view, since the Nepalese culture is lack of concept of being united, the Nepalese migrants are now also generally lack of vision for the whole Nepalese community in Hong Kong. Thus, “*sure they cannot community here*” (Lalit). Karna also agreed that the diversified organizational cultural was part of the Nepalese culture as well.

*Karna: Nepali community is no good...because I study in Nepal. Like this Eastern Nepal is one group, west part is one group, middle part is one group. And then politics, is one group, another politics is one group, no united one.*

*Q: how about the Nepalese community in Hong Kong.*

*Karna: it is the same...many groups, no good. How to going on only one group? But I think in this way, I talk to one person why this way, he tells in other way, no good.*

The diversity is because of different origins and political interests. As I have showed in the basis of solidarity, place of origin does show a strong basis of solidarity among the Nepalese in Hong Kong. Even though these associations do not have competition for members, they would not be aligned either as they have different interests, particularly regarding the political interests. Camala stated that the political emancipation in the early 90's affected the practice of the Nepalese associations both in Hong Kong and in Nepal.

*Nepalese community in Hong Kong, there are so many Nepalese community in Hong Kong, you cannot count. This is the...because before 10 years, there is no democratic...Every body was suppressed.*



*After ten years, they got democracy, every people, they shouted out. They talked about their experience. They expressed. Now in Hong Kong, we need...if we get together, then we make one association, like this...there are so many, so many. (Camala)*

Seeing the rapidly increasing number of organizations, many of them agreed that the internal diversity was the major obstacle within the community to enhance the cohesion. And now the community appears to be “no strong” (Lalit) because of the internal diversification and also the lack of leading association.

*They have the competition of to be a, to be a chairman...be a leader of their own group...own associations, and then all the association needs one, association need to be bigger one like this. No good...if they are really want to serve their community, they can serve under one association, no need to make so many association. (Arun)*

### 6.1.3 Internal Competition

The internal diversity not only creates tension within the community, it also causes conflicts in distribution of resources among associations. And conflicts of resources are due to the poverty of community too. As I explained in economic exclusion, poverty is apparently showed in the Nepalese community. One of the dynamics between economic exclusion and political exclusion is poverty intensifying the competition of resources. This particularly shows in the case of equal opportunity funding scheme. HAB annually provides the Equal Opportunity funding scheme for the public to launch activities in the good will of promoting equal opportunities and enhancing social integration. Since there is not many funding schemes specifically relating to the ethnic issue available in Hong Kong, it attracts many ethnic minorities groups and NGOs to apply. Many Nepalese associations also apply it.

*In the first two years, that means 1998 to 2000, we mainly contact with FEONA, Business Association and Alliance. But these two years, there are so many other Nepalese associations come to apply the funding. (Liyen)*

The budget of scheme is shown in Table 6.2. Considering this big amount of budget needs to be released every year and the small amount of project is being

granted, it is logical to think that each application does grant for quite a big amount of budget.

Table 6.2 Projects on Race (from Race and Sexual Orientation Funding Scheme)

Year	Total Amount (in Million)	Number of project
98-99	\$1.25	23
99-00	\$0.61	14
00-01	\$0.86	27

Source: Home Affairs Bureau

As showed above, if the budget was equally distributed in each project, each of them could get thirty to forty thousand dollars. Roshan told me that once his organization, Nepalese Businessmen Association (NBA) was granted for forty thousand dollars to launch Cantonese and Computer courses. Roshan told me that they got the fund even the courses were failed. Obviously, HAB approved the application too easily. In fact, the procedure of getting the funding divides into two parts. First, the applicant can get half budget to start the project when their application is approved. Second, they will get the rest when their project finishes. At the meantime, they are also required to hand in a written report about their project as well. In short, HAB scrutinizes the budget based upon documentary application and report. The budget is attractive and more importantly, it is easy to apply. No wonder the scheme has long been the battlefield of resource's competition between associations. It also explains why the phony application existing as well.

*There are cases that some associations did not do it properly. For example, they got seventy thousand funding, they did not spend one cent to launch any programme...but put the money into their own pocket. And then they made up a phony report and wrote the fake information about the expenses. They got money from that.*  
(Roshan)

Regarding the application procedure, HAB officer insisted that they concerned much about the purpose and aim of each proposal rather than a fair distribution among applicants. The priority would give to the proposal, which fits the needs of the community the most. However, having rich experience of contacting HAB



officer, Roshan did not concur with that. Roshan was tired of the phony applications as he thought that no one was benefited from those cases. He argued that HAB “*wasted their money to do like this to everyone.*” He suggested that HAB should cooperate with associations in order to supervise and to ensure the progress of each application. However, the officers of HAB told him the limitation and dilemma of their situation. They had to release the money annually even though knowing the existence of phony applications.

*So I told the Home Affairs Home about it. They said, Roshan, what to do? They apply, and then this is the budget and we need to release. (Roshan)*

In the past years, the Nepalese associations had been greatly benefited from the funds. But HAB did not release the actual figure due to the privacy regulations. When I asked Liyen the proportion of the Nepalese community sharing the funds, she did not disclose the number either. Nevertheless, she added that “*there are not only Nepalese associations applying funding concerning Nepalese community. We also work with the NGOs. There are also some NGOs that applying funding in order to launch program concerning Nepalese community*”. However, according to the estimation of Roshan, the overall budgets from the funds over the years should be enough for the Nepalese to build a community center. The large amount of the budget can be imaged.

*You know, when we group all the money together, that is a big funding. The amount of the money probably able to build up the community center. (Roshan)*

Besides the phony application, associations also have arguments on how to use the money. As the aim of the funds is supposed for the sake of the whole community to enhance equal opportunities, but the Nepalese associations cannot comprise at the point of the best way to spend the money in order to benefit the whole community. Some associations suggested to share the budget while some disagreed. The fact of without a comprised solution does not only reveal their diversity again, but also show the distrust among associations.

*In the community, people think that after your Business Association got the funding...We should divide the money. We should give the money to other association. In other words, we should let other associations have the chance to make money from that. Of course, I do not agree with that...then one time...all the committees were here, we discussed this problem in the meeting and I also told them the wastes of money. However, when I talked like this, everyone was against me...the thing is there is a limit of support and how to support. When they get the funding and spend like this, no one is benefit from that...that is because the community lack of solidarity. (Roshan)*

Above, I have illustrated two problems arose in the equal opportunity funding issue. First is the phony application. Ramesh Gurung<sup>89</sup> argued that only very few associations did that and those normally were small organizations. Most of the associations, as far as he knew, were truly social organizations which would not do anything more than organizing some social gatherings for its members. Apparently, this type of cheating behaviour is condemned in the community. Meanwhile, it also arises the distrust and deepens diversity among associations. Second is about the usage of funding. Different interests in different associations are showed. Their wish of sharing the funding together perhaps tells the scarce of existing resources rather than any wish of unification within the community. As they distrust each other, they cannot cooperate or let alone an individual association to use the funding. And once again, the distrust among organizations implies the diversity and tensions in between.

The HAB executive officer expressed the frustration of communicating with the Nepalese community, *"it is so hard to organize them (Liyen)"*. Even the Nepalese also seem well understood the disadvantages of being so divided. The eagerness of unification is explicitly shown and repeated by different interviewees. From the present coordinator of FEONA, Prem to a passive member of association, SaLaxmi also stressed the importance of unification among associations.

*All Nepalese should be united and make less association...If we make association, big number of associations, that means one association*

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<sup>89</sup> Ramesh Gurung is the former Chairman of FEONA, 1998-2000.



*become very weak, so it cannot be effective. Whatever they want to do, but it cannot be effective. So the association must be very few, little, in small number. But in Hong Kong, you know, there are so many different associations. In my opinion, many association should be one, should be united. (Prem)*

Being united has many implications. The most significant one is to strengthen their bargaining power when negotiating with the government in order to improve their present situation. Ramesh and Roshan agreed on this point. They both believed the power of unification as it was the only way of making their voice being listened and changes could only come afterward.

*If we group together, only one group to represent us, is good. Government will listen to us, our opinion is strong and better. (Ramesh)*

In fact, approaching the political rights and undergoing negotiation with government is just like taking part in battle for some organizational activists. Lalit took the stance that they were fighting against the government. After all, the government was being blamed for the social sufferings against the Nepalese. The government did not pay much attention to them and thus ignored their need of social protection. To apply the political right is all about ensuring the social rights. The wish of unification among associations vividly proves this argument.

*We must the community first. We must be get, make very, very strong community...then we can fight the government how to solve the problem. If our community are strong, then nearly we have, now 30 thousand Nepalese...we must fight for the government. Government must make the plan for us. So we think we must the community first. They we can fight the government, we can solve the problem, change the situation. (Lalit)*

However, even though people believed in the power of unified action, there was no actual move to make the unification throughout the years. People just talked about it. The breakthrough came in October, 1998 when the government stopped the Nepalese to have open visa to Hong Kong. This move irritated the Nepalese community and realized the need of making their voice by a united union. That is how the GNF being established.

#### 6.1.4 Establishment of GNF: Way to be United

Although FEONA was the oldest and also the largest organization by that time, it was difficult for it to be the leader of various associations after being accused of having the political background. Besides, acting as the umbrella association is outside its objective scope. In responding to the need of united association, GNF<sup>90</sup> was established in 1998.

*It established the reason why, the visa problem. Hong Kong government stop the open visa in October 1998...So we establish, the other 11 associations, family association and another association... we believe that when we make a federation...federation will be a umbrella association and government will support to us. This can be something (good) for those people. (Bholanath<sup>91</sup>)*

Indeed, the role of GNF is like the bridge between the Nepalese community and the government. On the one hand, the opinion of the community can be gathered and be forwarded to the government by GNF.

*So now day by day, more and more, other associations establish, started to establish...meantime Gurkha Nepalese Federation have 18 Nepalese associations under...that is the one most...they are the committee of Federation. During the meeting, they pass the subject...my duty is to forward to the government department. (Bholanath)*

On the other hand, GNF also keeps the Nepalese community be cooperative with the government through discussions and negotiations. After all, one of its objectives is to unite the Nepalese community in order to strengthen their power.

*Our organization objective is to maintain future of Hong Kong leading stand and objective is to co-operate Hong Kong government and Nepalese public, and making a good equal opportunity, fair. And any problem, giving a pressure problem of other country people, or other government department, whatever, our association, they go to talk to them, to neutralize, negotiation those matters and be together. (Bholanath)*

Unfortunately, GNF's establishment does not solve the existing internal

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<sup>90</sup> I heard that its new committees have decided to rename it as "Hong Kong Nepalese Federation" in 2002. However, when I checked records of association registration in Police Headquarter in April 2002, they still have not registered the new name there.

<sup>91</sup> Bholanath Thapa Magar is the founder Chairman of GNF till 2001



problem instantly. It not only fails to achieve the goal of re-open visa request, but also being doubted at its ability of uniting the whole Nepalese community. After all, it has merely half of the total number of existing organizations as its associated organizations. Meanwhile, the discussion of community center<sup>92</sup> with government illustrates that the internal diversity does not disappear after GNF established. Bholanath told me that they requested for a Nepalese community center from the government. And they expected it would be established in December, 2001.

*We request the land for Nepalese clubhouse. This is under processing. The discussion is already finalized. I must need it for to do the clubhouse. The land he, they are going to give us. They said in December. (Bholanath)*

The establishment of community center has two symbolic meanings. Firstly, it significantly shows the official recognition and acknowledge about the Nepalese community. That is important because it shows the community empowerment through the continuous conversation between citizens and government. It enables the community to develop their full potential and to have more involvement in order to exercise greater control over decisions affecting their lives (Rodger 1995; Madanipou, Cars and Judith 1998; Davoudi and Atkinson 1999). Secondly, it carries a functional meaning for the divided community to be united again. The community center provides a physical place for the Nepalese to gather. At least, the Nepalese will have a public place belongs to the community.

*Because Nepalese community, the Hong Kong government, they are giving Nepalese Federation, or to the Nepalese community to use a land first. After that, my opinion...they will get together...when the government provides clubhouse, they can use the clubhouse, like to say, meeting hall, or training hall, such as like it and traditional function, they can use, such as like it...when the Federation will get this, like all the Nepalese people will get together day by day, they feel that this is the good place for them. So within the two years, the Nepalese community they will be group together. (Bholanath)*

The need of community center is the consensus within the community. The

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<sup>92</sup> "Community Center" is the word used by the officer of HAB while some interviewees used "clubhouse" to refer the same issue.

Nepalese organizations need a place for gathering and launch programmes. For instance, when I first approach FEONA's coordinator in December, 2000, he complaint the lack of venue for the Nepalese community to hold function, and thus caused the difficulties of launching programme, especially for holding association's annual meeting which involves more than hundred of members to attend.

*It is still a problem to find a place, because this is Christmas, New Year Eve so that the proper place is still not all right, is still finding, so that we are afraid in December or January, we can do or not ...that is the problem. (Lekha)*

Finally the annual meeting was held in Indian Club and deferred to February, 2001. If they got their own community center, this kind of problem would not exist. Lack of venue causes either cancellation or postpone of some activities. That is totally destructive to the operation and function of associations.

In fact, the discussion of community center has been going on for more than two years already. When I interviewed the executive officer of HAB in March, 2002, she told me that the planning and discussion were still undergoing. The situation is not as optimistic as Bholanath thought. It cannot be established within these two years.

*When we have the meeting with Nepalese associations, we discuss the needs of the community. They told us their needs. And we also see this need...They need the place for social activities and gatherings. We also discuss this with the Architectural Services Department. But it is still processing. We still don't have any concrete plan about the management or anything yet. We need further discussion with the community. But it is so hard to arrange meeting with them. They are so diversified. (Liyen)*

What makes the negotiation process so slow? Liyen blamed the diversity of the community and that arose the difficulty of holding meeting between officers and the community members. Roshan also agreed with her. He pointed out that the government was willing to help the Nepalese to build their own community center as they had done that for ethnic groups, such as Indians and Pakistanis. Thus, the problem was not about the government policy but the internal problem of the



Nepalese community. He stated that was the biggest obstacle in the discussion.

*The government is definitely willing to give the place. They are happy to provide the place for Nepalese to establish the similar club or center. But the problem is ourselves. We against each other...if you tell anyone before you do something...I am sure that there must be someone opposes your idea...They are not only unsupportive, even worse, they stand opposite and against you. (Roshan)*

Planning is rather important in the discussion process. However, when government requested the concrete plan from the Nepalese community, they did not have it as they did not reach the compromise.

*They also want to see our plan, so they can give us the land. But we don't have. (Ramesh)*

Despite the fact of diversity in the community, government also posed a hard condition to them in the discussion. Government requested them to build it by their own funding. This time government got their weakness. As described before, the Nepalese are suffering from severe multiple exclusions. To large extent, they live in plight. The community poverty affects the efficiency of the political request as I mentioned in the dynamics of economic exclusion and political exclusion. It seems impossible for them to have extra money to build the community center even though that is for their own community. That is how the discussion comes to a dead-end. This is a powerful evidence that economic exclusion reinforces political exclusion.

*They just agree to give the land, we have to build the building by our own money. How come? We don't have money to do that. If we have the money, we won't be like that? (Ramesh)*

The site selection is also controversial in the community. Now the location has been proposed in Sun Tin, Yuen Long District. For this reason, HAB has to cooperate with the Yuen Long District Board to establish the Nepalese community center there. From the policy maker's view, land availability is the first priority of site selection. After all, the land resource is very scarce in Hong Kong. There is a high tension in land usage.

*In this case we are talking about building the community center in Yuen Long District, so we are cooperating with them. It is very hard to find place in other district to build the community center... there is a land available in Yuen Long. And in fact, there is a large Nepalese population in Yuen Long also. (Liyen)*

It is true that many Nepalese live in Yuen Long. However, compared with the Nepalese's population in urban areas such the Yau Tsim Mong District and Wan Chai district, I doubt if Yuen Long district was the best location for the community in the sense of convenience for the majority. Moreover, Sun Tin is further away from Yuen Long Center. It is near to the borderline between Hong Kong and China. In fact, it is the site of former Gurkha's barrack. It is a remote and distant from the public area indeed (Appendix 4). It is an undeveloped area where is lack of community facility such as transportation. In other words, they have proposed to build the Nepalese community center right in the middle of nowhere. This selection has arisen the dissatisfaction among the Nepalese. It is such an inconvenient location.

*The location is not good. It is too far away. Nobody wants to go there have gathering...How come? We go all the way and have gathering there? No lah! People don't like to go there. (Ramesh, Fieldnotes 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2002)*

The discussion is still going on. While GNF is trying hard to gather the Nepalese voice, the growth of small associations does not stop. Some informants perceived that resulted further internal diversity and suggested it as a problematic phenomenon, which must be stopped as soon as possible. On the contrary, some interviewees argued that the multiple associations could share the workload of organizing activities and providing services in a boarder sense. For instance, Camala suggested that *"if they can do good job for Nepalese society, it is ok."* Even the former chairman of GNF also agreed that.

*There is no harm although I can say that if the only need one association is better. But even open more, they would share the work, and they would share the problems. And I think it is good, internal, internal. (Bholanath)*



Here he suggested that being united did not mean the end of the small associations. But the community needs a representative group to lead the small groups. GNF aims at being the leading association and other small associations were like small branches. Internally, they run in their own way and serve different groups. Externally, they come together and speak for the whole community. That is rather idealistic thought indeed. As I illustrated above, it is not easy to enhance unification due to the complicated competitions among different associations regarding interests and resources. However, Bholanath was quite confident and believed that more associations would join the GNF one day.

*There are some associations they are running out their own way...present time Nepalese community, Nepalese association is, 17, 18 associations are already, they are giving a word to Federation, we need it and we will support to the Federation...so may be later, it comes more 25. Because when it is more, people go to there.*  
(Bholanath)

From the establishment of FEONA to GNF, the Nepalese community becomes more alert in its needs and yet rather loosely organized their organizational power. It is undeniable that GNF does turn a new page for the Nepalese to pursue the citizen rights by step further to their political rights (associated together, negotiate with different government departments and so on). It apparently illustrates the need of unification within the community is being alerted. To certain extent, it tries to reduce the internal diversity. However, facing the problems from both internal and external, it still has a long way to go before achieves its aims.

## **6.2 Reluctance and Domination: Individual level – “I don’t want to be involved.”**

The Nepalese community fails to enhance unification also due to the problems in individual level. There are two main problems in accounting for the failure of solidarity in individual level. First is the hesitation of political involvement. Second is the domination of economic life.

Within the community, political issue is not just something they do in Hong

Kong, but it is rather something to do with the homeland politics. This showed by FEONA's history previously. The homeland politics has extended to some of Nepalese associations in Hong Kong. While FEONA is being accused as standing for the Communist Party, other associations are also being suspected as they would connect with other political parties in Nepal.

*Another party appeared, that is the Nepalese Alien Association, it is the worse, the most useless and politicized association...And then more and more associations established. And they disagree and fight against each other. Hence, the Nepalese community becomes more and more diversified. In this case, it is very little chance that they can gather together. The possibility is so low. (Roshan)*

“Political” is a bad label for association as it implies aggressive, radical and sometimes chaotic as well. Here we have to go back to Nepal's contemporary history. After the political emancipation in 1992, the Royal family released much of its power to the congress except the military power. Meanwhile, the new constitution of democracy was not quite well established. That was how the power struggle began among different parties as well as different districts. Finally, it ended up with a civil war between the state government and the Maoists, the radical group of communism. As Roshan mentioned that communism won the election once, but that just lasted for six month. Now the Maoist is the enemy of the state.

Apparently, the political environment is very unstable in Nepal. This uncertain political atmosphere in homeland brings anxiety and insecure sense of being involved in the political activities to the Nepalese in Hong Kong. This is explicitly shown among those Nepalese businessmen who see the political involvement as a label, which would more or less affect their future development both in host society and in homeland. Ironically, they are also the one who established the first Nepalese association in Hong Kong. Now most of them have withdrawn from it. When I asked the former activist of FEONA, Trilok for his withdrawal from the organization in the recent years, he told me explicitly that he did not “*want to be related to any parties*”. Here he meant the political parties



specifically.

*I don't want to be an active member in any of them except this charitable (his organization). This is not affinity to any, anybody, anywhere, you know...I have many friends in Nepal, I have Minister, I have the MP, many friends I have, I don't want to involve in any kind of politics. Because it changes so fast, you never know what is going to happen tomorrow. (Trilok)*

Nevertheless, it is impossible for them to avoid all the social activities, especially when good social relationship and high publicity are influential factors of their business development. They have to maintain a sociable life. Their apolitical attitude not only shows in the associations they joined, but also appears in the activities they select.

*I only choose those activities where we have some kind of meeting, through that meeting, may be for everybody, you know, for the group, for the Nepalese community. And meetings now I am also avoid...I don't want to involve. (Trilok)*

Roshan also shared the same opinion with Trilok. He also withdrew from FEONA and started a new association, NBA. "Politics" was a sensitive word for him. In his interview, he strongly denied any connection with politics. Additionally, in order to avoid being condemned by others, he prefers donating to appearing or involving in other associations' activities. The hesitation of involving in the political issues is plainly shown in his words.

*I don't want to join the meeting or gathering. I don't want to involve with any political activities. Once you join an activity, and then next time, you don't go other activities. People will condemn you. So I decide not to go anymore...If they need money, I can give them some money, but not joining the activities. (Roshan)*

Being involved in different associations' activities for many years, Shiva also observed the political problem inherent in associations. Shiva was among the few who still involved in FEONA's activities since it started. Different from other businessmen, he did not worry much about the political issues within associations. That is why he did not stop joining those activities. He was quite optimistic to the situation as he viewed it mainly as generation problem. It would pass eventually

according to him.

*It is so many Nepalese communities herein Hong Kong, but it is just like in Nepal...Some of the old people, they bring what they get, but the young generation, they don't like this kind of things, I think one day will be coming one community together. I think the young generation people, they don't like the political thing...I am not worrying anything about that. (Shiva)*

Aside from businessmen, some interviewees stated that the connection between the association in Hong Kong and their homeland would have some political implications. And that ruined their interest to participate the Nepalese associations in Hong Kong. They were not interested in politics at all. For instance, Amrit did not involve in any organization although many of his friends did so. He never joined any political activities when he was in Nepal as well.

*Amrit: because I am not interested at all this activities. When I, when I was in Nepal also, I was not interested at politics, generally in the politics because that kind of institutions they are connected to different kinds of politics...I am not interested. I mean I don't know too much about the politics...many organizations I think they are connected to different kind of politics, you know.*

*Q: why do you think so?*

*Amrit: because they talk about the politics, like this. So I think so. They talk about the community, they talk about congregation, they talk about other things. I don't know too much about politics, you know, and I am not interested at it.*

In fact, unwillingness to participate in political matters is a barrier which deters individual from joining the organizational activities. Also, the divided political stances further divide the community and reduce the bargaining power. Roshan urged people who were interested in politics should join the local political institution instead of conveying the homeland politics to Hong Kong.

*I always insist that we are in Hong Kong...If our aim is earning money and career, if that is true, this is not the place for us to do any politics. If you like to do politics, you can enter into Hong Kong's politics sphere...But bring the Nepalese politics in Hong Kong is no use, right? That will only deterrent your situation, that will not input your situation...if you are in that place, you should do politics concern to that place if you like politics, otherwise, better not to talk any politics in Hong Kong. That will only result the internal*



*fighting against each other. It has been happening all the time.  
That's why Nepalese community can't be united. (Roshan)*

The word “political” is a stigma for associations. It reduces the interests of involvements among potential members. Besides naming in neutral basis, several organizations repeatedly stated their organization’s nature was purely sociable in the interviews. They delineated themselves from politics. That, once again, proves the undesirable of political element within the associations even though their activities are full of political implication. For instance, on the one hand, GNF actively engaged in negotiations with the government regarding different issues of the Nepalese community, such as visa problem. It is obvious that the organization carries the political function instead of purely sociable. On the other hand, its chairman insisted their sociable nature.

*We sent a letter to ask the Hong Kong government, open, open the visa. But it still, we haven't success yet, it still that is under the process. That is problematic. **But we are not the political party. But we are the social work.** We want equal opportunity for all...the Hong Kong government, they give trouble to the Nepalese, they are not looking as well, we have to talk to the Hong Kong government. If the Nepal government... they don't care...then I have to go to talk the Nepal government, the consulate general. Whether he provide a good answer or not. The case is always continue to grow up. **But Gurkha Nepalese Federation, it is not political team. This is social work, non-profitable association.** We work voluntarily for the public. (Bholanath)*

According to Marshall (1950), right of establishing organization is part of the political rights of citizenship. Associated together is an influential step of polling resource in order to pursue the community objectives, such as ensuring social rights. However, economic exclusion against the Nepalese dominates their life and affects the solidarity of associations. The reason of “*too busy with work*” was often their excuse from participating in organizational activities. Given that the majority of Nepalese work in demanding work, working ten to twelve hours per day and six days per week is just the way of living. Spending time on voluntary activities seems to be a luxury. Furthermore, they are toiled by work. That explains the



low participate rate of joining organizational activities.

*Q: are you member of any Nepalese associations?*

*Parbin: no. I am not member of any association.*

*Q: why don't you join any association?*

*Parbin: I am too busy to join. I go to work, go to classes. I don't have time.*

Ambar agreed with Parbin that life was very busy in Hong Kong. Ambar regarded time was very important to him and he did not have time to join any Nepalese association as well, not even to join his own caste's organization.

Chapter Four mentioned that one of the job conditions was unfixed working timetable among many Nepalese workers particularly those who worked in construction or catering fields. There were cases that they were required to work overtimes. Often, they also work on Sunday. During the weekdays, the overtime notice can be given as late as one hour ahead. Overtime on Sunday is usually announced only a day ahead. In other words, workers can seldom plan their activities in advance. Their involvement in activities thus becomes uncertain. Bhabin was one of the executive members of an organization. He was in fact very ambitious to participate in organizational committee. However, working as a waiter, he had problem with time crash on work and organization activities.

*Normally we get one, once a month in the general meeting in the committee. I normally went to that meeting. Suppose like on November we have one special program, and if I know that nearly one month ago, I can request for that to have day off from my duty. Because my day off is not fixed ago...And I can arrange for that. But sometimes, I can't, I just miss the meeting. (Bhabin)*

Moreover, participating in association activities usually comes as the second choice. Family is the first priority for most Nepalese parents who came here fundamentally for the economic purpose. In that case, working simply dominates their life in the sense of scarifying organizational life.

*Sometimes, I have time I help FEONA. Sometimes, I don't have time, I don't go FEONA. I give first priority is my job here...my family here, and my country, two children now going to school, and my wife is here. So I give first priority to my job. (Diwash)*



The low participation rate definitely weakens the solidarity and affects the effectiveness of the association. Frequently, members are absent from meetings. Some meetings have to cancel because of insufficient. Failure in holding meeting is the main practical problem organization faced. Needless to mention, issues cannot be discussed nor passed in that case as well. The organization can hardly function. For example, NBA is one of the oldest associations in Hong Kong. It had also actively communicated with government in representing their group. HAB officer also mentioned that NBA was one of the major Nepalese associations they used to connect often. However, the chairman of NBA, Roshan admitted that NBA stopped meeting or organizing activities for quite a long time since they seldom held meetings successfully. They had a big problem of members' absences from meetings.

*They did not attend the meeting even we called and informed them. For instance, we need 15 people to attend the meeting in order to pass the agenda. However, we didn't have enough attendance, so the meeting was failed. In that case, if we want to pass something or make a decision in the meeting, it is so difficult. That's why people become disappointed and reluctant to join association meeting. (Roshan)*

Comparing with avoiding political activities, economic domination against individual seems an unsolvable problem especially when most informants set the economic activities as their first priority of life in Hong Kong. Although most association activities or meetings hold either in the evening or public holidays, it is undeniable that participation rate is affected when time after work seems to be so limited. In addition, the surplus time is also being reserved for taking rest and family activities. When I posted this question to the coordinator of FEONA, he seemed helpless to solve this problem.

*Now what are they doing, there are associations, they are not fighting or doing activities among the society, but they meet in evening. They can meet, they can set some programmes in weekend like Sunday, and they finish work, they record it in their manual, its association activities...If people have time, if people got little time, we have thought about their time for the association, if*

*they have time to join. If they don't have time, it is okay. It is all right, who has time, they can join. (Prem)*

This chapter illustrates the problem of the Nepalese community in searching complete citizenship. Regarding the discussion of citizenship, Soysal and Marshall have different ideas about the sequence of fulfillment. Soysal revises Marshall's idea and argues both social and civil rights are given earlier than political rights. However, her argument does not apply to this study. Political rights are granted to the Nepalese community at the very beginning. They use it to gain and ensure their social rights. Establishing association, in fact, is a political means to gain and ensure other social rights. This is why the Nepalese established associations to negotiate with the government and to fight for their own rights. On the one hand, the Nepalese hold the belief of complete citizenship as a solution of social exclusion. On the other hand, their case proves that Marshall's idea of citizenship fulfillment is still appropriate to contemporary social setting.

In the past studies of social exclusion, the attention always pays to the role of social agents and actors who execute social exclusion rather than recipients (Silver 1995). However, as argued Chapter Two, the response of individuals is crucial as situation can be modified through the interaction between the executor and excluded groups. In this studies, the internal diversity of the Nepalese community, i.e. the excluded groups, definitely affects the progress and effect of defending their social interests. Even though people have alerted the need of unification if they wanted to make their voice being listened by government, there are still many barriers to overcome. Internal diversity is the main barrier that is created by themselves.

The internal diversity of the Nepalese community can be analyzed as the political and cultural factors, which include castes and district of origin. Among all, political issue is the major obstacle for unification. From the interaction between government and the Nepalese community, the internal diversity and external challenges of unification are vividly shown. Apart from the



organizational level, individual reluctance of active participation is also a significant factor of internal diversity. The hesitation of political involvement and economic domination causes individuals withdrawn from organizational activities. In a nutshell, the internal diversity of the Nepalese community is the main obstacle to utilize their political rights in order to ensure their social rights. Nevertheless, from the establishment of FEONA to GNF, the Nepalese community steps closer to unification. That is a big step towards ending exclusion as well. Their case suggests the importance of excluded group in the studies of social exclusion should not be underestimated. Obviously, they are partly responsible for their present situation.

## **Conclusion: We Have No Choice**

*We have no choice. We have no choice. If we not do any job, we cannot eat, we cannot survive here. (Lalit)*

Hong Kong has been promoted to be an international city of opportunities and chances. People come here to strive for their future and hope to improve their life. However, this saying is inapplicable to certain groups of people. Ethnic minorities are typical examples. They are being socially excluded and hence have no choice in this city, ironically.

Social exclusion is a newly developed term. It has been widely discussed in different academic realms in western countries since 1980s. Even so, it often confuses with other developed terms such as “poverty” and “underclass” which also describe the isolated groups. This is the main reason that some scholars question its novelty and usefulness. Indeed, there are differences between social exclusion and other terms especially regarding to its comprehensive and dynamic characteristic. Meanwhile, there is little sophisticated discourse within the academic community on ethnic minorities in a Chinese majority society. This thesis studies the Nepalese community as an example to illustrate the social exclusion against ethnic minorities in a Chinese dominated society, i.e. Hong Kong, to arise discourse on ethnic minorities as well as to contribute in theory building of social exclusion.

One of the major features of social exclusion is its extensive definition. It provides flexibility to its application. The definition is according to the specific social context of its discussion. Hence, Silver (1995) suggests that its definition actually reflects the political culture of its discussion context. In other words, its definition is significant to understanding the host society. Nevertheless, for better analysis, the emphasis should be given to different social aspects including cultural, economic, civil and political arenas, instead of focusing on the economic aspects alone for studies of social disadvantage or underclass (Silver 1995; Gore 1995;



Rodgers 1995; Sen 2000; Levitas 1998). This is also the major difference between Anglo-Saxon and French tradition in the studies of social disadvantaged groups. The former likely emphasizes much on the economic aspects. This thesis follows French tradition and thus analyzes the four social aspects to enhance a better understanding of the social suffering of the Nepalese in Hong Kong. Under each realm, specific definition is given based on the fieldwork. In fact, the definition directly reflects the political culture and emphasis of a Chinese dominated society.

Cultural exclusion is defined as lack of cultural capitals including language ability, skill and knowledge of the host society. The language barrier is regarded as the most difficult problem to overcome by the respondents. Unable to speak fluent Cantonese and low standard of English are two major causes of their disintegration into the host society. Nevertheless, their standard of spoken English is better than that of their Cantonese. Sadly, English cannot help them much to assimilate smoothly since English remains uncommon to the ordinary life here. Their English standard does not advance them in the social mobility either. That is why many of them are working at the 4D job. In addition, they are lack of practical working skills. Although some of them acquired skills and experience, their skills are inappropriate for working in Hong Kong. What's more, people come here full of expectations but lack of practical knowledge about the host community. Even some of them have been staying here for quite long, they still do not have much idea about the social resources. All these cultural disadvantages could be found in the Nepalese community. The Nepalese are in fact alert in this exclusion. However, those cultural capitals are inaccessible no matter how hard they try. Some interviewees took some formal training courses to upgrade their language standard and skills, but that did not help much.

Economic exclusion is shown by their present income statistically and more importantly, reflected from other qualitative aspects such as job nature, condition and environment and terms of payment. Their jobs are low status, high risk, long

working hour, insecure employment and less payment compared with the locals working in the same post. In the past studies, the excluded groups always take up 3D work: dirty, dangers and demanding. Apart from that, I have added the fourth D, i.e. devalued, to describe the excessive economic exclusion against the Nepalese. Many Nepalese have suffered from either unemployment or underemployment. While they do not have stable income, their tiny income can hardly cover their expenses in Hong Kong despite the fact that they also need to send money back to Nepal and take care of their family members there. Accommodation is their major expense. Due to the unstable income, they have to make some adjustments in their living expenses. On the one hand, some of them rent affordable but comparatively expensive, congested rooms in an old, ill equipped building in the urban area. On the other hand, some of them rent cheaper but poorly constructed huts in rural area. The community resource and transportation in those rural areas are inadequate. Economic exclusion has limited their choice of expenses and affects other aspects of life.

Civil exclusion is explicitly showed on their daily life experience. Cases of discrimination against their ethnicity and nationality happen frequently. Some of them would describe Hong Kong people as rude, impolite and uneducated. Those impressions are vivid evidences of existing discrimination in Hong Kong. They are being treated as second-class citizens. Furthermore, they seldom have close relationship with the locals neither in neighbourhood nor in work. They are distant friends of the locals. There is a clear cut between relationship in work and friends in social life. Their relationship with colleagues rarely extends to private life. They have a superficial relationship with their neighbours or even landlord. Some of them have quite bad impression on the locals. All these imply the low quality interactions between the Nepalese and the locals. The Nepalese cannot integrate into the host civil society nicely. They suffer from civil exclusion.

Political exclusion is invisible in political issues. Very little public money



goes to improve their quality of life. In this studies, the Neaplese did not appear in the agenda of government planning for years until 2001 when their population first appeared in the population census. The social services for meeting their needs are underdeveloped although they have been settled here more than a decade. Hence, youngsters have problems in education admission and adults have difficulties in enrolling the vocational training courses. In theory, those are in fact their privileges as being a Hong Kong citizen. In practice, those are inapplicable to them due to being neglected by policies makers. Their rights are being uninformed. All of these are evidences that government has overlooked their existence and does not make any special arrangement to meet their needs until recent years. There is still much room for improvement.

Each exclusion carries one or two themes. Cultural exclusion is based upon inaccessible to cultural capital. Economic exclusion can be seen in 4D work. Civil exclusion is showed as second-class citizens and distant friends while political exclusion is treating the Nepalese as invisible citizens. What's worse, there is an obvious dynamics among modes of exclusions. In the past studies, little attention has been given on the dynamics between exclusions. In fact, the dynamics between exclusions take a crucial role of pushing the excluded group, i.e. the Nepalese in this study, to the edge of the society. The understanding of interplay between exclusions is more important than knowing the definition of exclusion from different social aspects. After all, each social aspect does not exist alone. Different dimensions of social exclusion actually reinforce each other profoundly. They together form a trap of no escape. What's more, the dynamics of exclusion are also essential to show the priority among exclusions, which is significant to extend the theory building of social exclusion. Based on the case of the Nepalese community, there are six types of dynamics among exclusions. The first two types of dynamics show relatively strong impact towards the excluded group comparing with other types.

First of all, the disadvantaged Nepalese face many difficulties when they participate in the labour market because of the cultural exclusion. They are low in bargaining power due to the lack of cultural capital in language ability and skills precisely. They often suffer from unemployment because of that too. Their choices of work are limited. Those are showed in the economic exclusion. At the meantime, the economic exclusion has restricted them to combat the cultural exclusion. They are dominated by economic activities, which are also consequences of economic exclusion. And thus, they do not have time to acquire the cultural capital formally. Neither their working environment can provide chance for learning quality language or advancing their skills. The cultural exclusion is indeed extended further. Hence, the economic exclusion has strengthened the civil exclusion and vice versa.

Secondly, the cultural exclusion has enhanced the civil exclusion. The Nepalese fail to establish intimate relationship with the locals because of incompetent communication. Instead, they remain distant friends with the locals. Some Nepalese also experience discrimination because of misunderstanding. Also, experiences of discrimination are often due to the attitude of locals treating the Nepalese as second-class citizens. Meanwhile, their low frequency of shopping in Chinese shops or eating in Chinese restaurants have once again show their limited contacts with the locals due to the language barrier. However, the further they detach from locals, the fewer chances they have to gain the cultural capitals. There is a malign dynamic between cultural exclusion and civil exclusion.

Thirdly, cultural exclusion has arisen political exclusion in many ways as well as political exclusion has impact on cultural exclusion. Due to the political exclusion, the Nepalese had not been put on the political agenda of the government. Their needs were being largely ignored in the past years. The government fails to assist them to integrate into the society. So the Nepalese have difficulties to acquire cultural capitals through official means in order to combat the cultural



exclusion. That explains partly the inaccessibility of cultural capitals. At the meantime, the cultural exclusion is a barrier for the Nepalese to access the public service. They do not have much knowledge about the host society especially the social resources. As a result, they generally seldom forward their needs to the government. Hence, their needs are being unheard. Cultural exclusion and political exclusion indeed add force to each other.

Fourthly, dynamics between economic exclusion and political exclusion are illustrated in 5.4 and the last part of Chapter Six. The greatest impact of economic exclusion on political exclusion is reducing the participation rate of political activities by dominating individual's life. As the Nepalese are working in 4D work, they are toiled by demanding work. Their low participation rate in organizational activities has decreased their negotiation power with government. Consequently, they are further excluded from politics. On the other hand, the political exclusion arises the difficulty of acquire skill in public institutions and enhance economic exclusion. It also has direct effect on the economic exclusion. Obviously, the Hong Kong government does not do much to help the excluded groups to be freed from economic exclusion. Following the *lassie-faire* philosophy, the government tries to preserve a market economy. In that case, the economic disadvantaged people, such as the Nepalese, are often being scapegoat of economic growth. They are being further exploited and suffer from the economic exclusion. These are typical examples of malign dynamics between economic exclusion and political exclusion.

Fifth, economic exclusion and civil exclusion have harmful impact on each other as well. Economic exclusion has enhanced further civil exclusion in at least three ways. First, because of demanding job and limited income, the Nepalese seldom have leisure time and extra money for social activities in order to establish civil relationship with the locals. Secondly, many of them are lack of chance to meet up with the locals due to the extreme form of economic exclusion, i.e.



unemployment. Therefore, unemployed people are civilly excluded as well. Thirdly, the temporary job nature is often destructive for them to establish a long-term friendship with the locals. Their residency also reflects the economic exclusion against them. Many Nepalese live in the same neighbourhood on account of cheap rent. Those places are often remote from city center. This kind of living environment restricts them to extend their civil relationship with the locals. On the contrary, civil exclusion has less direct influence on economic exclusion. The most significant one is limiting its source of social capitals and hindering the Nepalese from economic advantages. To sum up, civil exclusion reinforces economic exclusion and vice versa.

Lastly, political exclusion and civil exclusion interact with each other. The most serious civil exclusion is being discriminated as second-class citizens. However, the government fails to see the problem of discrimination and reluctant to legislate in this area. Instead of this, the government applies soft and passive policies to educate and to promote race harmony and social cohesion. The repeated occurrences of discrimination against the Nepalese have proved that our government has not done enough on this aspect. The government used to ignore the problem and excluded it from the policy agenda until recent years. That is discrimination indeed. There is no foreseeable future for the Nepalese because of the political exclusion. As a result, most interviewees have planned to return to Nepal instead of staying permanently in Hong Kong. Their plan of leaving has affected their interest of being involved in any long-term relationships or activities. In other words, they exclude themselves from civil relationship. That is how political exclusion becomes harmful to civil relation. Meanwhile, civil exclusion reinforces political exclusion by their distance from community. Due to unpleasant experience encountered in daily civil life, eventually the Nepalese have generated a detached attitude towards the community. In this case, it is understandable that they retreat from the community activities, including political involvement. This



also results in their low participation in political petition. Hence, their voice has been ignored because it was too low after all.

There is a complex relationship between different exclusions. All of these malign dynamics among dimensions of social exclusion have built up a big web of exclusion which pushes the Nepalese living in the social margin. They are depressed because of these suppressions. They cry for no choice as they realized that is a vicious cycle against them. Furthermore, their case proves the importance of studying the dynamics between exclusion. Their real problem is not the facets of exclusion alone but the malign dynamics among modes of exclusions. Hence, more attention should be given to the dynamics instead of defining exclusion concretely alone in the further studies. That will be more practical and useful to examine the situation of the disadvantaged parties. In fact, the idea of focusing on the dynamic between exclusion is an extension of Rodgers' (1995) idea of focusing on process. Rodgers argues the distinguish feature of social exclusion is capturing the "created and recreated by the operation of social and economic forces". In the process of creation and recreation of exclusion, the forces from different social aspects are dynamical and can neither be eliminated nor be underestimated.

In the discourse of social exclusion, researchers believe that the fulfillment of citizenship is a way to tackle the problem (Davoudi and Atkinson 1999; Madnipoor, Cars and Allen 1998). In fact, regarding to the narratives of citizenship, the Nepalese exercise their duties with respect to the host polity in many ways. They participate in the labour market and pay taxes. Nevertheless, they fail to exercise their rights fully. Or they have to go through many hurdles before they can exercise it. Those are in fact social exclusion against them.

According to Marshall's citizenship model, citizenship fulfillment goes in sequence of legal citizenship, political citizenship and then finally social citizenship. Soysal (1994) has argued that citizenship of European guestworkers is no longer following this model. She suggests that nowadays guestworkers first acquire the

social rights before they gain the political rights. My argument is that in the situation of social exclusion, social right is basically impossible to be obtained without the political rights. The case study of the Nepalese community has proved my argument. The Nepalese are undoubtedly eligible for the legal citizenship as they are granted for the ROA. But their social sufferings have clearly showed the failure of their social rights, which is an essential element of citizenship. Meanwhile, the organizational activities have proved that they were actively seeking for the improvement via political rights. Unfortunately, the process does not go smoothly. Due to the organizational and individual diversity, the Nepalese community still cannot be unified. The competition and tensions between various organizations are founded. The detachment of individuals from organizations are observed. Political apathy and economic domination are reasons of detachment. From the establishment of FEONA to the founding of GNF, the Nepalese community indeed has been moved forward to the unification. The changes in organizational nature have showed the modifications of concern and emphasis of the community. Thus, I argue the significance of utilizing political rights in the case of combating social exclusion. This also supports Marshall's idea of citizenship fulfillment. The political rights are granted first and being used to ensure the social rights later.

The Nepalese community is just one of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Despite the top ten ethnic groups mentioned in the HKAR, there are still many other ethnic communities living in Hong Kong<sup>93</sup>. Social exclusion against the Nepalese can be interpreted as an example illustrating the social condition of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. From this study, we can further summarize two important implications about combating social exclusion against ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

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<sup>93</sup> Unfortunately, there is no any official report about the actual number of ethnic groups in Hong Kong. This evidences the governmental ignorance of ethnic minorities' existence.



The first implication is the government must take an active stance to end the social exclusion. As Rodger (1995) mentioned, the government is an influential social actor in the exclusion process. When it has not taken any active role to help ethnic minorities to settle in our society, that is exclusion in nature because its policies of assistance has defined inclusion or exclusion against certain groups already. Hong Kong government annually distributes large amount of budget in helping new arrivals from Mainland China and neglects the needs of other ethnic groups. For instance, there are different assisting projects launching in every district to help new arrivals to integrate into our society. Also, one of the major responsibilities of Home Affairs Department is being the coordinator of service for new arrivals from Mainland China since 1996. However, there is no specific service for other ethnic groups. The big contrast of government policies regarding services – types of resource – for new arrivals from different places suggests the government as an influential actor of social exclusion.

The second implication is the significance of community's unification in combating social exclusion. Here refers to the response of social exclusion from the excluded groups. As illustrated previously, the internal diversity is the nightmare of the Nepalese community. It causes problems both internally and externally and slows down the development of the community. As a contrast, the Indians illustrate the success of unification. According to HAB officer, it is quite easy to communicate with the Indian community since whenever the government seeks for the need of the community, *"we just need to talk to one or two representative associations, that is it."* (Liyen) In that case, the government is easy to understand their needs and thus responds them quickly and correctly. The unification of the community also helps to gather bargaining power. That is one of the reasons that the Indian community is well developed in Hong Kong. Here also suggests the importance of the responses from the excluded individuals in the process of exclusion. The Nepalese community takes up certain responsibility of

their present hardship. Undoubtedly, their internal diversity has negative effects on the battle of combating social exclusion. In other word, they also participate in the social exclusion against themselves as well. They are not passively being excluded. Nevertheless, the Nepalese community has short history in Hong Kong. It is just the beginning of their battle against social exclusion.

All in all, this thesis has two aims. First is to define the exclusion in a Chinese dominated social context, i.e. Hong Kong. Undoubtedly further studies are needed in the academic discourses on ethnic minorities. To pinpoint the importance of studying dynamics among exclusions is also crucial to the theory building of the social exclusion. The second aim is further understanding of complete citizenship as a solution of ending social exclusion. By analyzing the social exclusion against the Nepalese community in Hong Kong and their difficulties of their citizenship formation, these two aims are achieved. The Nepalese are socially excluded both in Hong Kong and in their homeland. While in search of their political citizenship fulfillment as the solution to end the exclusion, they have to encounter internal problems. There is still a long way to go before they can be finally freed from exclusion and have real and fair choices. Their experience may well reflect the social situation of other ethnic minorities and have with implication for social exclusion in Hong Kong.



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**List of Interviewees**

Name	Age/ Sex	Job	Years in HK	Legal Status/ Age of return to Nepal	Educational Attainment
Ambar Tamang	30/M	Senior Shop Assistant	8	ID Holder / 11	College (Unfinished because he failed term examination)
Amrit Gurung	50/M	Construction worker	4	Dependent of wife	Unknown
Arun Gurung	37/M	Bamboo scaffolding worker	6	Dependent of wife	Diploma Level (Unfinished because of work)
Bhabin Kafle	25/M	Waiter	6.5	Dependent of father	Secondary Level
Bholanath Thapa Magar	42/M	Senior controller of Security company	7	Dependent of wife	Unknown
Bindiya Gurung	25/F	Administration assistant	5	ID Holder / 6	College (Unfinished because of coming to Hong Kong)
Camala Rai	42/F	Principle of Kindergarten	5	Dependent of husband	Master Degree (English Literature)
Dhan Gurung	34/M	Restaurant owner	8	ID Holder / 3	College (Unfinished because of working)
Dipendra Gurung	54/M	Jobless	3	Dependent of Children	Boy service of British army
Diwash Limbu	31/M	Foreman of construction workers	6	ID Holder / 3	Secondary Level
Ekraj Rai	45/M	Principle of Kindergarten	9	ID Holder / 6	Two Master Degrees (Commerce)
Jayanti Rai	23/F	Visitor	1M	ID Holder / 3	Diploma Level (Education)
Karna Gurung	32/M	Jobless	6	ID Holder / 1	Secondary Level
Keshab Gurung	32/ M	Welder	9	ID Holder / 9	College (Unfinished because of coming to Hong Kong)
Kopila Tamang	32/F	Courier	8	Dependent of Ex-husband	Secondary Level
Kusum Gurung	30/F	Jobless	6	ID Holder	Primary Level
Lalit Gurung	40/M	Welder	5	Dependent of wife	Diploma Level (ISCAG – agriculture institution)
Laxmi Kamar	30/F	Kitchen Worker	5	ID Holder	Secondary Level

Name	Age/ Sex	Job	Years in HK	Legal Status	Educational Attainment
Machhindra Gurung	37/M	Repairing worker	6	ID Holder / 2	Secondary Level
Mira Gurung	33/F	Helper in flower farm	6	ID Holder / 1.5	College (Unfinished because of coming to Hong Kong)
Parbin Rai	34/M	Security Guard	4	Dependent of wife	Secondary Level
Pawan Bishwakarma	22/M	Construction labour and shop owner	4	Dependent of mother	High school (Boarding School)
Prem Rai	34/M	FEONA Coordinator	2M	ID Holder / 1	Graduate (Science Politic)
Renuka Gurung	26/F	Waitress and Cleaning worker	6	ID Holder / 3	Primary Four
Roshan Shakya	40/M	District manager of Insurance company	27	ID Holder	University in USA (Unfinished because of financial problem)
Sankar Gurung	45/M	Jobless	5	Dependent of wife	Secondary Level
SaLaxmi Gurung	33/F	School helper	7	ID Holder / 12	Secondary Level
Sarmila Tamang	24/F	Waitress	5.5	ID Holder / about 8 to 10	College (Unfinished because of coming to Hong Kong)
Shiva Bahadur	45/M	Managing Director	11	ID Holder	Unknown
Suresh Gurung	29/M	Welder	5	ID Holder / 3	College (Unfinished because of financial problem)
Surya Rai	33/M	Waiter	4.5	ID Holder / 1.5	No schooling
Trilok Briswakarma	39/M	Owner of restaurants	24	ID Holder	Gurkha School
Udeep Limbu	30/M	Construction worker	6	ID Holder / 3	College (Unfinished because of coming to Hong Kong)
Upendra Gurung	27/M	Sales Executive	7	ID Holder / 9 or 10	Graduate
Yogan Gurung	41/M	Welder	4	Dependent of wife	Unknown



## Appendix 2

### Employment history and present income

1. **Ambar** worked as the cleaner in a sport club at first before he got the ID card. But that job just lasted for three to four months. After he got the ID card, he worked as security guard for two months in Wan Chai. Through the help of a Chinese friend, he found a job titled Sales Assistant in Wellcome supermarket. Since then he continuously work in there for more than seven years now. He was night shift captain and earned about \$12,000 monthly. He resigned the job in late 2001 and returned to Nepal because of sickness.

2. **Amrit** got his first job in Chek Lap Kok as a ganger. He worked as the supervisor to look after labourers. He worked there around one and half year. And then he only worked some part-time or short-term jobs for the next one and half year. Finally he got a job in KCR as labourer again in early 2001 but lost it again in September, 2001. He told me that he planned to go back Nepal during the jobless period. His daily salary was \$500 while I interviewed him.

3. **Arun's** first job was painting in the Tsang Ma Bridge Project. He worked there for 6 months. And then he found another job as rigger in another company but for the same project. He worked nearly two years in the Tsang Ma Bridge Project. And then he worked in the new MTR line in Chek Lap Kok to Hong Kong for about one year. However, later when the project was nearly completed, the company dismissed some workers including Arun. He was unemployed for about six months. He joined bamboo scaffolding company by the introduction of labour department. Now he also works in the same company. In fact, he was frustrated at construction work in between. He resigned from the bamboo scaffolding company once and tried to find job in other fields. Specifically he looked for vacancy in Kadoorie farm. But there was no vacancy for him. So he rejoined the bamboo scaffolding

company when it had vacancy again. Now he earns about \$12,000 to \$15,000. It depends on the overtime.

**4. Bhabin** have been working as waiter since he got here. His first job was in an Indian restaurant. But the restaurant did not run well and he left the company after few months. And then he went to work in one of the Chinese restaurant where also served the western food as well. He worked in that restaurant for nearly six months. He resigned the job because of disagreement about his salary with the management. He was jobless for few months after that. He got a new job again as a waiter in a high-class membership club. He has been working there nearly five years now. He earns \$10,000 per month at present.

**5. Bholanath** is a senior controller in a security company. He is an ex-Gurkha who has severed 18 years in Hong Kong, from 1976 to 1994. After he retired from British army, he returned to Nepal. Later he came back Hong Kong via dependent visa by the sponsorship of his wife. He has been working in the security field through out the years. Privately he also works in insurance company as part-time job. He earns \$300,000 annually.

**6. Bindiya** started to work in a German company since she came to Hong Kong in 1996. At first, she was administrative clerk. Now she is promoted to be administrative assistant. She is satisfied with her job except the salary. She earns \$8000 per month.

**7. Camala** worked in a British construction company for documentation work. She worked there for about one and half year. She disliked her pervious job as she had to work on tiny things and put them on maps. She blamed that job gave her headache and later she needed to wear glasses. That was the only working



experience she had in Hong Kong before she started her own kindergarten in Yuen Long. Now she and her husband works fulltime in the kindergarten. They have about 60 students and the school fee of each student is \$590 per month. They have employed three fulltime teachers. While I interviewed her, she asked me to look for a part-time teacher to teach Cantonese in her institution. Their future plan for the school is not only enlarge it to be inclusive to other ethnic minorities, but also extend it to be connected with primary and secondary school as well.

**8. Dhan** got his first job in Tsang Ma Bridge in 1992. He worked there for three years and two months. He worked in different posts such as welder, rigger and ganger and so on. After that he got job in Tai Tam Tunnel. He was foreman of 27 workers that time. Later he worked in Chek Lap Kok. He had a serious head injure because of an accident there. He was hospitalized for ten months. It left 18 stitches on his forehead. Then he changed his job to restaurant field. He started to work in an Indian restaurant in 1997. But the restaurant closed in February, 1999. Then he opened his own restaurant and a food stall in April 1999. The business was quite well. When I first interviewed him in early 2000, his restaurant was only about 100 sq feet. I visited him again in September, 2000, he enlarged his restaurant to be about 300 sq feet. However, the business was not very good that time as the cost was increased after he enlarged the restaurant.

**9. Dipendra** is an ex-Gurkha who severed 12 years in Hong Kong, from 1972 to 1984. He returned to Nepal after his retirement from Gurkha. He joined the post-war cleaning mission in several countries such as Bosnia. He had accident and lost one leg in 1997. He came to Hong Kong to join his sons in 1998. He tried to look for job since he has been here. However, he could not find any job because of his disability although he has approached the labor department. He was still looking for job when I interviewed him. He invested some money at construction company

with some of his friends. But they lost money there. He wanted to earn back those money before he went back to Nepal.

**10. Diwash** worked as security guard when he came in 1995. That time he did not have Hong Kong ID card yet, so he just worked as part-time there. Six months later he got the ID card and started to work in construction site. His first construction work was in Tsang Yi Bridge. He worked there for one year. When that job finished, he worked for Jordan ferry to Kowloon station. In between he experienced two months unemployment. He recalled that he and his wife lived on his wife's income from working as kitchen helper when he was unemployed. When I interviewed him in August 2001, he was working in the garbage tunnel project for one year and two months already. He earned \$700 per day there. At that time he already predicted that that project would be finished within two or three months. I heard that he was looking for job in April, 2002.

**11. Ekraj** worked as storekeeper in a British construction company at first. And then he joined the insurance company and worked there four years continuously. Then later he left there under his wife's request. He started a primary school named Poinsettia with some friends in 1999. The majority of its students were Nepalese and Pakistanis from Yuen Long district. However, he left the school due to some disagreement with other founders of the school. Later he joined his wife in working on their newly open kindergarten in 2000. The kindergarten is also target at ethnic minorities in Yuen Long area. Ekraj told me that their future was to include other different minorities, such as Filipinos and Indonesians in their school. They also plan to further develop the school into primary and secondary school. Now most of their students are Nepalese and one is Pakistani.

**12. Jayanti** was born in Hong Kong. She has applied the permanent ID. When I



interviewed her, she came here to visit her father who is ex-Gurkha and works as security guard in Hong Kong. She came to Hong Kong almost every year and stayed here for about a month. She mentioned that she probably would not come to Hong Kong after his father retired from Hong Kong. She did not plan to live or work in Hong Kong. Now she is a college student who major in education. She would like to work in Nepal and help to develop the country.

**13. Karna** first worked in Tsang Ma Bridge as rigger there. That job was only last for 22 to 23 months. Karna was jobless when I interviewed him. He previously was construction labourer in the MTR North Point Station construction site. He worked there until he got head injury and hospitalized for 22 days. His job in MTR was part-time nature. He signed the full-time contract only for the first three months. Later the company continued to employ him but in part-time basis. Totally he had worked there for 11 months. He earned \$14,000 to \$15,000 per month there.

**14. Keshab** first worked in a Member Club as a helper for three years. And then he was caretaker in the German Swiss International school for about one year. Afterward he got the first construction work in Chek Lap Kok and learnt the welding skill. Since then he worked as welder continuously. During my fieldwork, he has changed three jobs and experiences two times of jobless. The first time he was dismissed from the garbage channel project since the project nearly finished that time. He was jobless for one and half month. He got a new job in Ma On Shan and worked for two month. Then he went to Nepal. When he came back in late December, he did not get job until February. He earns more than \$15000 per month.

**15. Kopila** came to Hong Kong as a domestic helper at first. However, she was determined because her employers divorced. Fortunately, she was able to extend

her stay by getting a new job. She got several experiences working in different restaurants but each time she did not work long. She also worked in construction project of Ting Kou Bridge for few days. She regarded that was terrible experience because it was too hot to work in the construction that time. Now she is an office messenger in an Indian Company. She earns \$8000 monthly. Meanwhile, she is looking for part-time job as she wants to earn more.

**16.** Before **Kusum** had accident, she worked in construction site as laborer. She had an accident and broke her toe when she was working in Chek Lap Kok in 1997. After she had accident, she could not get any long-term job. The longest job she got was ten months. Sometimes she only got jobs in construction sites for two or four months only. At the time I interviewed her, she had been unemployed for about five months already.

**17. Lalit** worked a general labourer in a construction company. Then he worked in Chek Lap Kok as welder. He lost his job as the Chek Lap Kok project finished. After that he went back to Nepal and took rest there. But he could not find any permanent job nearly for year after he came back. He could only worked on some short-term or part-time job, for example just work for 15 days or one months. And then he got job in construction site in Cheung Sha Wan and Lion Rock. But he resigned it after seven or eight months because the company reduced his salary and signed the contract differently. Then he got job in Tsang Yee to build the garbage tunnel. He earns \$20,000 per month.

**18. Laxmi's** first job was in a nursing home nearby Kowloon city. She worked there for three months before she got the ID card. After she got the ID card, she worked in Kai Tak Airport as language mover. Later she started to work as appetizer cook in a French restaurant in Central. When I interviewed her, she was



thinking about changing her job. She had been working in the same restaurant for four years. She felt that was about time for her to change job. She was unsatisfied about the salary, which was \$7,500.

**19. Machhindra** started to work in Hong Kong since 1995. He got the first job in the Chek Lap Kok as general laborer. He worked there for three years in different posts: 18 months for tunnels' building, one year for building runways and nine months for MTR station. He met Keshab when he worked in Wah Tung Company. His recent job was welder in Tung Chung ship repairing company. He earns \$14,000 per month now.

**20. Mira** worked in a learning-Cantonese center for one year. After that, she changed to be security guard and worked for about one month. Later she joined the Chek Lap Kok construction work. She worked as cleaning helper in the post office of the new airport for four months. When I interviewed her in August 2001, she was working as helper in a flowery farm for four months already. Since Mira has high blood pressure, she had abortion before. After that, it was quite hard for her to work in those construction areas or any other kind of hard job. She repeatedly mentioned that she would like to have a good and easy job, such as clerical work. But she could not found. Her present monthly income is \$5500.

**21. Parbin** only has two working experience in Hong Kong after he retired from British Army. As an ex-Gurkha, it is easy for him to join the security field. He first worked in the Jardine Company for security from 5<sup>th</sup> Mar, 97 but he resigned it in December, 99. When he first joined the company, he got \$13,000 per month and plus \$600 travel allowance. He disliked Jardine since it reduced employees' salary to \$11,000 in 1999. Then he did some part time jobs, such as bodyguard for two weeks. Now he works as security guard and patrol the residential area in the

peak. Now he earns \$15,000 per month.

**22. Pawan's** first job was laundry boy in near Tuen Mun after he got the ID. He worked there for about six months. And then, he worked in construction site for nearly one year. He lost the job when the project finished. Later he joined a framing company as helper. He learnt framing there. Meanwhile, he opened his first shop with his friend in 1999. It was more like a game center where he put the Nepalese popular game, Carambel, there. But that shop only opened less than one year since the game was not popular in Hong Kong. Later, he opened another groceries shop in 2000. The shop is more like family business. Most of the time, his brother worked in the shop. Pawan helped there after work. Meanwhile he also worked as construction laborer in the Hong Kong University extension project. But he lost that job in September, 2001 when the project finished. He earned \$400 per day from that job.

**23. Prem** is the present coordinator of FEONA. He got his ID in 1995 as he was born in Hong Kong. But he did not have any working experience in Hong Kong until he came to work for FEONA in May, 2001. The coordinator contract is two-year basis and the monthly salary is about \$10,000. He did not plan to continue working here after he finished the contract. He was more interested at working for the labor movement in Nepal.

**24. Renuka** has been working in a family restaurant since she came to Hong Kong in 1997. It is a small restaurant, which only opened for breakfast and lunch. Renuka is a helper who in charge of almost everything from cleaning to cooking. She needs to go to buy the vegetable and cooks them in the morning. Then she cleans and washes dishes in the afternoon. At night, she cooks dinner for her employer and his family. The employer provides accommodation for her. She earns around \$7000 monthly. At the same time, she has a part-time job since June, 2001. She works



as part-time night shift cleaning helper in a hotel. She earns \$5,000 per month from the part-time job. Her reason of holding two jobs simply wanted to earn more money before she had homeland visit.

**25.** After studied in USA, **Roshan** did several part-times job before he joined the insurance industry. He joined the insurance industry around 1983 and worked in the field since then. In between, he worked as insurance department director in BCC bank. Later the bank closed because of financial problem. Afterward, he re-joined insurance company. Now he is a district manager earning average \$50,000 per month. He also owns a grocery shop.

**26. SaLaxmi** has been a school helper working in International school sine she got here. she has been working there for five years now. She did not change the job although she was dissatisfied with the salary. She earned \$7,000 monthly. Nevertheless she enjoyed the easy work and abundant holidays provided by the job.

**27. Sankar** got his first job in Chek Lap Kok as carpenter in 1996. He worked there for about half year. He resigned and joined the AJWJV construction joint venture. He got better salary there than other companies, so he stayed there for about 18 months. After he finished working there, he went back to Nepal and took rest for two months. But he could not find any job after he returned Hong Kong for three to four months. Afterward, he joined the clock factory and worked for 18 months at "*a very small salary*" according to him. But later the company closed and he joined other part-time or short-term jobs such as security guard etc. He was still unemployed at the time I interviewed him.

**28. Sarmila's** first job was a salesgirl in an optical shop. But she only worked there for two weeks. And then she joined a Mexican restaurant as part-time waitress

there. Six months later, she changed to be fulltime waitress in the same restaurant and worked there for almost five years. Her monthly salary was about \$12,000 including tips. She was dismissed in July, 2001. When I interviewed her in September, 2001, she was still looking for job. However, she got a new job in October, 2001.

**29. Shiva** has been working in the restaurant business for about 25 years. Firstly, he came to Hong Kong via contract visa in 1991. He was employed by a clubhouse. He worked there up to 1995. After he finished his contract, he started his own restaurant business. Now he is the manager director of a food service limited, which owns several different types of restaurants in SoHo areas. Although he complaint that the business environment was bad after 1997, he opened a new restaurant in October, 2001. The new restaurant is specially targeted at the Nepalese young generation. It provides Nepalese cuisine as well as Nepalese cultural dance.

**30. Suresh's** first job was in Chek Lap Kok. He worked there for nearly 14 months. As he learnt the welding skill in Nepal, he started to work as welder right away. He worked in Tung Chung after the airport project finished. But he was unemployed for nine months in between. Then he was employed again in Sheung Wan's construction site. His lately job was working in the garbage tunnel. He had been worked there for about two years. He lost that job in the September, 2001. He was still looking for job till 2002. His lately salary while he worked in garbage channel was above \$15,000.

**31. Surya** got his first job in Ting Kao Bridge three weeks later after he made the ID. In Ting Kao Bridge, he worked as carpenter for about four months. Then, he worked in the new station, Hong Kong station of MTR. He worked there for about



one year as carpenter as well. Later, he changed to be security and worked for it for a year. After he completed the contract there, he worked in Hong Kong Book Center as shop assistant in customer service for about one and half year. He resigned that job because of low salary. Now he is waiter working in an American theme restaurant. He earns about \$7000 per month.

**32. Trilok** first started to work as part-time waiter in an Indian restaurant while he was still student in Gurkha school in 1979. After he finished his studies, he worked as full-time from 1982 to 1985. His first restaurant was opened in Chung King Mansion in 1987. Now he owns five restaurant and two groceries shops. Although he mentioned that the business environment became slow after 1997 and did not show much improvement, his lately restaurant was opened in 2000. All his restaurants are owned by partnership.

**33. Udeep** worked in a construction company. His job was stopping the water to come in the tunnel. He had working there for 11 months. Then he lost his job in 2002. He did not tell me much about his job history. His recent salary was about \$15,000 to \$20,000.

**34. Upendra** was security guard at first. After working for 18 months, he changed to other company and continue to work as security guard for another four months. Meanwhile, he worked for a bar as part-time security guard at night. Then in first of July, 1997, he started a new job as waiter in bar. He was promoted to be supervisor later. Four years working in the same bar, he met a lot of friends. Later, he was recruited to be a indoor salesman for an online baby product. When I interviewed him, he was still doing that job. Few months later, he lost the job. When he worked there, he earned \$12,000 per month. In addition, through out the years, he was part-time musician and being hired by various Nepalese concerts.

And he also tried to organize a concert with some friends as well. However, that time he was not quite success and lost some money.



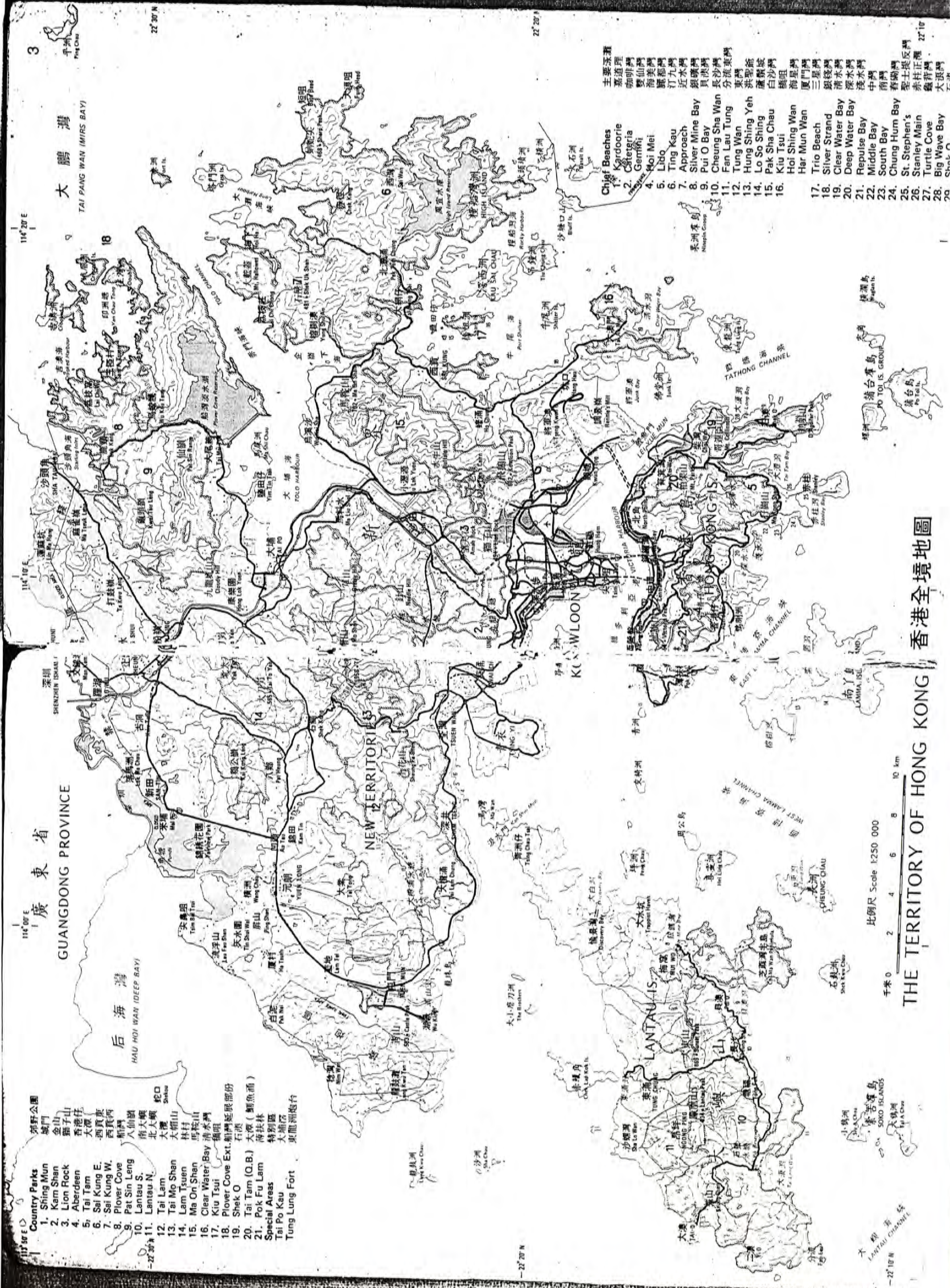
### Appendix 3

#### Accommodation and Rent

Name	Living Area	Rent	Personal Monthly Income	Family Size in HK	Size of House (Sq. Feet)
Ambar Tamang	Wan Chai	9500	12000	Unknown	400
Amrit Gurung	Gurkha Village	1750	<15000	4	300
Arun Gurung	Yuen Long Village	2300	<15000	2	300
Bhabin Kafle	Wan Chai	7000	9000	2	300
Bholanth Thapa Magar	Hung Ham	Unknown	25000	2	Unknown
Bindiya Gurung	Wan Chai	8000	8000	3	Unknown
Camala Rai	Yuen Long Center	4000	35400	Unknown	Unknown
Dhan Gurung	Yuen Long Center	Unknown	20000	Unknown	Unknown
Dipendra Gurung	Tuen Mum	Unknown	0	4	495
Diwash Limbu	Jordan	2250	>15000	2	350
Ekraj Rai	Yuen Long Center	4000	35400	4	Unknown
Jayanti Rai	Yuen Long Center	Unknown	0	2	Unknown
Karna Gurung	Yau Ma Teei	2800	0	Unknown	200
Keshab Gurung	Wan Chai	6500	>20000	6	600
Kopila Tamang	To Guan Wan	2000	8000	Unknown	Unknown
Kusum Gurung	Gurkha Village	1800	0	2	Unknown
Lalit Gurung	Gurkha Village	2500	>20000	2	300
Machhindra Gurung	Gurkha Village	Unknown	14000	2	300
Mira Gurung	Gurkha Village	1600	5500	2	200

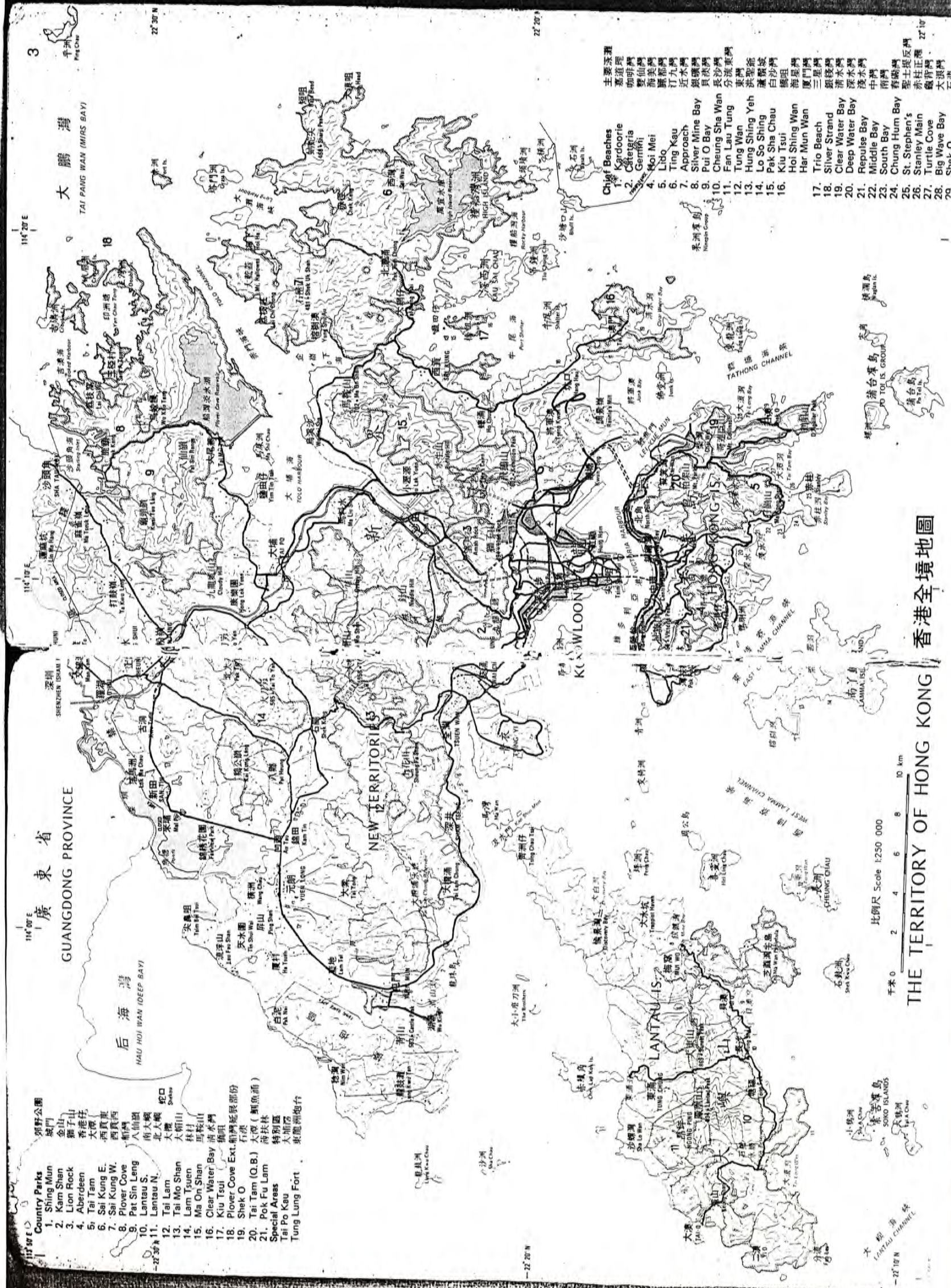
Name	Living Area	Rent	Personal Monthly Income	Family Size in HK	Size of House (Sq. Feet)
Parbin Rai	Jordan	Unknown	15000	4	Unknown
Pawan Bishwakarma	Yuen Long Center	Unknown	<15000	6	Unknown
Prem Rai	Yau Ma Teei	Unknown	10000	Unknown	Unknown
Renuka Gurung	Wan Chai	Provided	12000	Unknown	Unknown
Rita Kamar	Wan Chai	Unknown	7500	Unknown	Unknown
Roshan Shakya	Kwun Tong	Unknown	60000	3	600
SaLaxmi Gurung	Wan Chai	5000	7000	Unknown	250
Sankar Gurung	Yuen Long Center	1400	0	2	Unknown
Sarmila Tamang	Wan Chai	9500	12000	Unknown	400
Shiva Bahadur	Central	Unknown	>30000	Unknown	Unknown
Suresh Gurung	Jordan	1000	>15000	2	3 bedrooms
Surya Rai	Wan Chai	2000	7000	1	350
Trilok Briswakarma	Junk Bay	Unknown	>30000	3	6000
Udeep Limbu	Yau Ma Teei	1500	>15000	2	3 bedrooms
Upendra Gurung	Wan Chai	Unknown	12000	2	Unknown
Yogan Gurung	Gurkha Village	1800	>15000	2	300







Source: Hong Kong Guide Book, 1994





Name	Living Area	Rent	Personal Monthly Income	Family Size in HK	Size of House (Sq. Feet)
Parbin Rai	Jordan	Unknown	15000	4	Unknown
Pawan Bishwakarma	Yuen Long Center	Unknown	<15000	6	Unknown
Prem Rai	Yau Ma Teei	Unknown	10000	Unknown	Unknown
Renuka Gurung	Wan Chai	Provided	12000	Unknown	Unknown
Rita Kamar	Wan Chai	Unknown	7500	Unknown	Unknown
Roshan Shakya	Kwun Tong	Unknown	60000	3	600
SaLaxmi Gurung	Wan Chai	5000	7000	Unknown	250
Sankar Gurung	Yuen Long Center	1400	0	2	Unknown
Sarmila Tamang	Wan Chai	9500	12000	Unknown	400
Shiva Bahadur	Central	Unknown	>30000	Unknown	Unknown
Suresh Gurung	Jordan	1000	>15000	2	3 bedrooms
Surya Rai	Wan Chai	2000	7000	1	350
Trilok Briswakarma	Junk Bay	Unknown	>30000	3	6000
Udeep Limbu	Yau Ma Teei	1500	>15000	2	3 bedrooms
Upendra Gurung	Wan Chai	Unknown	12000	2	Unknown
Yogan Gurung	Gurkha Village	1800	>15000	2	300





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